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THE CATASTROPHE

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CATASTROPHE

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BY
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THE CATASTROPHE.

Part II.

A TERRIBLE MYSTERY.

I.

ALL along the outer boulevards of Paris from the Ternes to Belleville there was no better café than the "Café de Périclès," which, thanks to its brilliant lights, could be distinguished a quarter of a league away when the twilight had set in. It had been opened in 1865 on the ground floor of a new house by a Prussian named Justus Putzenhofer, who had been attracted to Paris not only by the hope of making his fortune, but also, so he declared, by his strong liking for the French nation. In conducting this establishment he was assisted by his wife, who was still young, and by a cousin who, although apallingly ugly, rejoiced in the name of Adonis, and was amiability itself. As for Madame Justus, she was short, plump and rosy, and many frequenters of the place thought her most attractive when she arranged the plates of sandwiches on the counter and poured out the foaming Bavarian beer.

No café keeper was ever so obliging towards his customers as Herr Justus. Whenever he heard a discontented grumble or a harsh exclamation he laid down his pipe and hastened to ascertain what had gone wrong. Nor was he ever courageous enough to dismiss a well-known customer at closing time. Not he—he simply put up the shutters, and after making sure that no indiscreet ray of light could be detected through the chinks by the vigilant police, he allowed his customers to tarry as long as they pleased. If this practice had been discovered the worthy German would certainly have been severely punished, as closing regulations are very strictly enforced in Paris; and for this reason he was in the habit of sending his cousin Adonis to bed on these occasions, as if he doubted his watchfulness, and mounting guard himself. Seated near the window, he watched and listened, and whenever he heard the measured tread of the police approaching on their beat he would hastily say to his belated customers: "Hush! For heaven's sake, gentlemen, speak low."

One night Justus Putzenhofer was thus engaged in listening while three habitués of his establishment played a game of cards together. One of them was a respectable gentleman of the neighbourhood, named Rivet, another a young journalist, named Aristide Peyrolas, and the third a medical practitioner who had recently taken up his abode at Montmartre, Dr. Valentin Legris, a man of thirty or thereabouts. They were busy playing, and the clock had just struck the half hour—half-past one—when all at once an appalling shriek was heard on the boulevard outside. The players instantly

threw down their cards, and simultaneously started to their feet. "Did you hear that?" they exclaimed, addressing Justus.

But the phlegmatic German was not the man to be disturbed by such a trifle. "I heard it; yes, of course I heard it. It came from one of those wretched drunkards who roam about the outer boulevards all night long, fighting and quarrelling with every one they meet. In my opinion the police would do far better to keep their eyes on the roughs, rather than meddle with an innocent fellow like myself, who interferes with nobody."

Peyrolas shrugged his shoulders. "The police!" he muttered, in tone of bitter sarcasm, "they only trouble themselves about trifles."

However, the explanation given by the Prussian seemed so plausible, that the party had already returned to their cards, when all at once there came another shriek—more terrifying even than the first one. "Help! help!" cried a voice.

This time there was no mistake; the tone was one of unspeakable agony. "It is some deed of violence!" cried the doctor, and he darted towards the door:

But prudent Justus had sprung in front of it. "Gentlemen," he pleaded, in the most imploring tone, "have you forgotten that you are here against the law? Besides, I can't allow you to run any risk."

But the gentlemen hastily thrust him aside, and taking down the bars themselves, they dashed out on to the boulevard. Nothing! Not a human being within sight. The broad thoroughfare seemed quite deserted, although through the stillness one could distinguish the distant sound of running feet.

"I told you, gentlemen, that it was nothing," said Justus.

But this was by no means the doctor's opinion. "If people run like that," he said, as he listened, "it is because some evil deed has been committed. Let us look!"

This was more easily said than done, for the night was so dark you could not see your hand before you. Moreover, a thick fog was rising, and this increased the difficulty. No matter—the party crossed the sidewalk, and examined the whole neighbourhood with infinite care. Suddenly M. Rivet uttered an exclamation, and his two companions darted towards him. "What is it?" they cried in the same breath.

"I have found something—a body here on the ground. I stumbled over it."

The doctor and Peyrolas stooped down, and perceived a man who was lying with his face in the mud, and to all appearance unconscious.

"Well, well!" muttered the journalist—"and this is Paris in 1870! People are assassinated with quite as much impunity as they used to be in the Forest of Bondy. Where on earth do the police keep themselves?"

But the doctor paid no attention to the angry journalist. He was kneeling beside the man on the ground, and trying to ascertain his condition. "He's not dead," he said at last; "and perhaps we may be able to revive him." And, with little regard for the fears of the terrified Prussian, he called: "Hullo, Justus! Come and help us to carry this poor devil into your place."

The German was a man who knew how to extract good from evil; so he meekly obeyed, and carried the unconscious man in his own robust arms into the café, where he laid him on a billiard-table.

The card players were then able to examine the man whose life they had in all probability saved. He was a handsome fellow, between twenty-five and thirty, wearing a full black beard. The light of the lamp, suspended

above the billiard-table, fell full on his face, and showed how extremely pale he was. His clothes were covered with mud and blood, but they were elegant and well made; while his linen was exquisitely fine and white. There was one singular circumstance; several tiny scraps of paper had remained between his half-parted lips, as if, at the very moment when he lost his consciousness, he had had coolness enough to swallow some dangerous document. But the doctor was the only one who noticed this, and he did not speak of it. He rolled up his sleeves, and as he proceeded to divest the unconscious man of his clothes, he called for some water, a sponge, and old linen. "And wake your wife instantly, Justus," he said, "she must scrape some lint for me."

But it was unnecessary to summon Madame Justus, for at this moment she appeared, shivering in her dressing-gown, and upon perceiving the young man stretched out on the billiard-table, she gave vent to shriek after shriek. "Hush!" said her husband. "It's a poor fellow whom I rescued from some murderers just now;" for Justus began to realise that he might make something out of the affair. "He will come to, Dr. Legris, will he not?"

"Yes!" said the doctor, who had finished his examination of the wound. "It is not as bad as I thought. If the blow which he received here on the shoulder had fallen on his neck, he would, at this minute be as dead as Julius Caesar—for a knife sharp enough to have made this gash would have speedily severed the artery. But as it is he will be on his feet again in less than a month's time."

While Justus and his wife were listening to the doctor, the journalist had drawn Rivet aside, and was exclaiming with an inspired air, "I shall write an article on this subject, at once—it shall be one to move the masses. I shall say that the present government employs the police to organize rows and riots, while these roughs assassinate us. I shall draw up a petition——"

"Do be quiet," interrupted the doctor, impatiently, "for the poor fellow is coming to himself."

The wounded man had indeed opened his eyes—and with the assistance of Justus had raised himself to a sitting position. He looked about him with wild, affrighted eyes—knowing neither the room in which he found himself, nor the persons by whom he was surrounded.

"I must thank you, gentlemen," he faltered at last, "for having saved my life at the risk of your own."

The doctor here stopped him. "Our merit is not as great as you imagine," he said. "When we reached you your would-be murderers had fled."

Intense astonishment was depicted on the countenance of the wounded man. "Had fled!" he muttered; "fled without killing me!" And as if a sudden thought struck him. "Have I been robbed?" he hastily asked.

His clothes were given him, and he found that his watch and purse had disappeared. "Then they were thieves after all!" he said, as if this loss proved the falsity of some previous conviction.

The journalist and his quiet friend, M. Rivet, paid no attention to the man's strange manner. But Dr. Legris duly noted it. It is really a little odd, he thought, that this man should be so astonished at not having been murdered; and it is strange that he should be assaulted at this hour, and in this part of Paris, for any other cause than robbery. Suspecting some mystery, the practitioner exclaimed, "Have you any idea who the men were who attacked you?"

"Not the slightest,"

"Should you know them again?"

"I did not even see them."

"The night is certainly very dark, but——"

"My dear sir, I was flat on the ground before I realized that I was surrounded by murderers," cried the young fellow. "If I had received the slightest warning I should have defended myself—and successfully too!" And he unquestionably would have done so, for all about him indicated strength and activity. "The snare was skilfully managed," he continued, "I was on my way home, and had just passed this café, when I heard some one groaning. I stood still and listened. I heard the groans again, and on looking about I finally discovered a man half lying on the ground. I leaned over him, and as I did so, I received a blow from a heavy stick on my head, and was felled to the ground."

"The assassins were hiding behind a tree, I suppose," said M. Rivet, sagely.

"I was merely stunned," continued the stranger, "and in a moment or two I realized where I was; but, as I struggled to my feet, again, I suddenly felt a sharp pain between my shoulders, and uttered a shriek, I fear. I remember nothing more."

To all appearance the doctor heard this narrative unmoved, but he was watching the young man very closely. "Very well," he said, "you must make a formal complaint, and give your evidence to-morrow morning."

But the stranger started. "No, no!" he cried; "on no account whatever." And he spoke these words in such a tone of terror, that every one except the doctor was astonished.

"Upon my word!" Rivet whispered to the journalist, "one would think he was afraid of seeing the inside of a law court!"

The stranger in some measure, realised the effect he had produced, and spoke again: "I shall make no complaint; and if you are willing, gentlemen, to add another favour to the very great one you have already done me, you will entirely forget to-night's occurrence."

The anxiety with which he awaited a reply was so evident that the doctor took pity on him. "We will respect your secret, sir," he said; "you have our word to that effect."

"Agreed," added Peyrolas, "and yet what an article I could have made out of it!"

This point having been settled, the wounded man seemed to feel infinite relief, drank a soothing mixture handed him by Madame Justus, and declared he was well enough to go home. And, as his new friends assisted him in putting on his coat, he added: "My name is Raymond Delorge, gentleman, and I reside in the Rue Blanche. I hope at some future time to show you my gratitude." But he had over-estimated his strength, for as he tried to walk, he tottered. "I don't like this," he said; "my head swims and my limbs seems very weak."

"I knew you could not walk home," said the doctor; "but as your heart seemed set upon it, I decided to let you see for yourself. Adonis has gone for a vehicle, and one will be here immediately."

Cabs pass all night along the Boulevard de Clichy, and the landlord's cousin had but little difficulty in procuring one. The doctor helped the wounded man into the vehicle, and then took a seat by his side, while the driver snapped his whip over the weary horses. Rarely had Dr. Legris' curiosity been so much excited, and he with difficulty repressed the innumerable questions which hovered on his lips. However Raymond Delorge did

not seem to notice this as he quietly asked, "Do you think, doctor, that I shall be obliged to remain in bed for any time?"

"For a few days—yes."

"But it will be more than an inconvenience to me—it will be a positive misfortune."

"But——"

"And that's not all. I am at a loss to know how I can account for this accident. I have lost my father, and reside with my mother and sister, and I have every wish to spare them unnecessary alarm. They are naturally nervous."

"Say nothing about it then—hide the garments which would tell the story—and simply call yourself indisposed."

"I was thinking of that—but I shall need a medical man."

"Who, of course, must be your accomplice," hastily interrupted the doctor. "Very well, I will come and see you." He almost instantly regretted the precipitation with which he had made this offer, but he had no time to say anything more, for the cab stopped. The young man alighted slowly, but without assistance, and as he clutched hold of the knob on the door of the house he lived at, he exclaimed: "You will excuse me, doctor, if I do not ask you to come in to-night, but I know very well that my mother never closes her eyes until I return home, and the fact of another person being with me at this late hour would seem very strange to her. I must also ask you, sir, to kindly pay the driver, for the scoundrels have left me without a penny."

"All right. But you must not stand here in the night air. Be very prudent. You will see me at noon." And thereupon the doctor dismissed the cab, preferring to walk home.

"What a strange adventure!" he muttered as he went along, "and what a strange fellow! What could that letter have been which he swallowed? And why is he unwilling to enter a complaint? However, I flatter myself that I shall find out the enigma to-morrow, and so I won't puzzle myself about it to-night."

But this was easier said than done, and the fact is that Dr. Legris' busy brain worked on, refusing to rest. The next day it was with the greatest difficulty that he refrained from calling at the house in the Rue Blanche before twelve o'clock, but, in fact, the hour had barely struck when he rung at the door. An old man servant, who looked like a retired veteran, at once answered the ring, and he had evidently been warned, for, on perceiving the doctor, he exclaimed: "My young master expects you, and if you will kindly follow me, I will show you to his room."

The doctor found his patient much better than he had ventured to expect, and, when he had examined the wound and prescribed the proper course to follow, he took a chair, vaguely hoping for some clue to the mystery. But the wounded man did not make the slightest allusion to the affair, except to say, in answer to a question, that his mother had no suspicion that anything out of the common way had happened. He then at once turned the conversation into another channel.

This was the result of Dr. Legris' daily visits for more than a week. He was always received most cordially by Raymond, who welcomed him moreover with an air of especial frankness, as if he desired to keep up this chance acquaintance; but any allusions to himself, his own affairs, and his family, were carefully avoided. Ten days elapsed without the doctor even seeing his patient's mother or sister. And when of an evening Peyrolas, the

journalist, or Rivet asked for news of young Delorge, the mortified medical man could only say, "He's the same as cured now, and he will come in here some evening. He is a good enough fellow in his way, but uncommonly reserved. He was a pupil in the Polytechnique School, and became a civil engineer."

This was, indeed, all that the doctor had discovered up to a certain carnival Sunday—the 28th of February, 1870—when at about five o'clock in the afternoon he called on Raymond. His patient started on seeing him, and exclaimed, "I was afraid, doctor, that you wouldn't come!" The young fellow's usual apathy of manner had vanished, and he spoke in an agitated voice, while his eyes glittered with fever. "Has anything happened?" asked Dr. Legris.

Instead of speaking Raymond took a letter from his table and handed it to his friend. This missive bore no signature, and it was written on coarse paper in red ink. It ran as follows:—"An event which Monsieur Delorge must witness will occur to-night. He *must* go to the ball at La Reine Blanche. A man will go up to him and say, 'I come from the Garden of the Elysée.' Monsieur Delorge must follow that man, wherever he leads him. If he is not willing to do this for his own sake, he will do it for hers; and let him believe, in following these instructions, that they come from a friend."

The doctor perused this singular communication, and then quietly said, "I think your enemies wish to finish the work they began the other night." "And yet," answered Raymond, gravely, "It is my duty to obey this letter."

He spoke in so firm a tone that the doctor did not dream of contesting the point. "At least," he said, "you must not go alone!"

Raymond had apparently expected this reply, for he looked Dr. Legris full in the face, and said, "Unfortunately, I have no one whom I can apply to. My life is a singularly lonely one. My only two intimate friends are far away. Where could I hope to find a man who would brave unknown danger for my sake, and first swear absolute secrecy?"

It was not mere curiosity that actuated the doctor now. Little as he knew young Delorge, he had learned to appreciate many excellent qualities he possessed. He had taken a strange liking to him, and having once rescued him from death, he did not hesitate now that danger showed itself anew. "Who will do it?" he replied in a firm voice. "Why, I will—yes, I will go with you, and I will swear to be dumb."

And, indeed, a few hours later Dr. Legris and Raymond Delorge were on their way to the dancing hall appointed by the anonymous letter.

II.

WHEN you reach the top of the Rue Fontaine-Sainte-Georges of an evening you can perceive straight in front of you, on the other side of the outer boulevard, a large number of gas burners, arranged as a garland above a very spacious portal. This conducts to the Bal de la Reine Blanche, one of the typical dancing establishments of Paris. On the right hand side is a wine shop, divided by flimsy partitions into a number of private compartments. On the left there is a cheap pastry cook's, where the working people in the neighbourhood come to purchase dainties of the most appalling description—fruit tarts and cakes garnished with cream. It is not the *élite* of

Paris who dance at La Reine Blanche—but decency of appearance, manners, and conduct are strictly exacted. On ball nights—that is to say on Sundays, Mondays, and Thursdays—crowds of young fellows with shiny caps and equally lustrous hair, are to be seen hurrying towards the establishment. It was an especially festive occasion the evening when Raymond Delorge and Dr. Legris presented themselves at the door. Two huge placards—one on each side of the portal—announced that a grand and fancy masked ball would take place that night in honour of the Carnival. They walked in and followed a long avenue, planted on each side with evergreens, till they reached a vestibule, where two attendants were on duty. Thence they passed into the ballroom, which was not unlike a large barn in its proportions, being extremely narrow and long, with a very low ceiling, ornamented with extraordinary frescoes. At the further end was a raised platform, where serious-minded people talked and drank, while the floor—or rather the space reserved for dancers—was encompassed by a ballustrade, beyond which a number of small tables were arranged.

The *fete* was at its height when our two friends entered. Amid the din of a number of trombones and other noisy instruments, some two hundred persons of either sex—all equally red and out of breath—were dancing in a state of wild enthusiasm and excitement which made them seem as if they had fallen victims to an epileptic attack. Seated at the tables round about another couple of hundred more persons of both sexes were drinking wine and beer with unextinguishable thirst. The heat was intense, the gas blazed, and the odour was unendurable, while from the floor there rose a cloud of dust, which settled on the coats and dresses of the dancers.

Despite the placards, which promised a masquerade, there were very few fancy costumes among the dubious-looking coats. And what costumes they were:—nameless rags, which had done duty year after year, at Carnival after Carnival, on the backs of bibulous, disorderly fellows, who had covered them with wine stains at *barrière* drinking dens. It was only with some difficulty that the doctor and Raymond found a place on the platform, whence they could overlook the scene, and a vacant table. Hardly were they seated than a waiter appeared, and asked what he should bring them. "Two glasses of beer," said the doctor in reply.

Thanks to his height and his square shoulders, and the stentorian voice with which he shouted, "By your leave!" the waiter was able to shove through the crowd, and could soon be seen returning with the beer; but before he put down the tray, he exclaimed: "Twenty sous—in advance as usual." Dr. Legris paid the sum mechanically, without paying attention to the singularity of the demand. He had placed himself at Raymond's disposal, and had determined not to evince the least inquisitiveness, no matter how much he might feel. On his side Raymond Delorge was at a thousand leagues from the present situation. With his elbows resting on the wine-stained table, and his eyes fixed on vacancy, he sat, absorbed in painful thought. He did not seem cognizant of where he found himself, and failed to notice that polkas were succeeding quadrilles, and waltzes, mazurkas, and time fast passing on. The doctor, however, was by no means so indifferent to the passage of time; he repeatedly drew out his watch, and finally, losing patience, he shook his companion's arm, exclaiming: "Do you know that the night is wearing on, and that our man has not yet put in an appearance? If your letter should prove to be a stupid mystification—"

Raymond started like a sleeper who is suddenly awakened. "Impossible!" he replied.

"And why? This letter alludes to a mysterious 'she'—a 'she' who loves you probably. May it not be that—"

"You are quite off the track" answered Raymond with some impatience. "You remember the words of the letter, don't you. The man who will accost me is to say, 'I come from the Garden of the Elysée!' Very well, it was there that my father, General Delorge, was killed, on the 30th of November, 1851."

Raymond's tone, and the fierce gleam in his eyes awoke a thousand conjectures in the doctor's mind. But he had no time to reply, for his attention was attracted by one of the rare maskers in the ball-room, who had been watching them for some time already. He was a short man, of decidedly commonplace appearance, although his costume comprised a pair of velvet knee breeches, a cloak faced with satin, which had been white, and a Spanish vest, to which half the buttons were lacking. On his head he wore a red *toque* with a long plume.

"Can this be the fellow?" thought Dr. Legris.

He was not mistaken in his conjecture, for suddenly the man approached Raymond, tapped him familiarly on the shoulder, and, in a voice hoarse by addiction to alcohol, exclaimed: "I come from the Garden of the Elysée."

As if he had been worked by a spring, young Delorge rose to his feet and replied: "I am ready to follow you."

"In that case come quick, for I am very late," and the man took off his mask and wiped his face.

This gave Dr. Legris great satisfaction, and, studying the man's countenance, he said to himself: "He is utterly incapable of a crime; but I wonder if he proposes to go out with us in that dress?"

To the physician's relief, however, as soon as the unknown individual reached the vestibule, he took up a long cloak and threw it over his shoulders, at the same time exchanging his plumed *toque* for a shabby felt hat. Then, with an air of self-congratulation, he muttered: "It does not take me long to change my skin; and if your legs are as good as mine—" But he suddenly stopped, realizing, in fact, for the first time, that Raymond was not alone. "Oh! oh! oh!" he exclaimed—each oh! being ejaculated in a higher key than the preceding one—"I was told that there was only one person—"

The doctor was about to speak, when Raymond silenced him with a gesture. "If this gentleman cannot go with me," he said quietly, "I shall give up the idea entirely."

The masquerader was evidently perplexed, and angrily scratched his nose. This was probably a habit with him when he wished to quicken his thoughts, and it apparently succeeded on this occasion, for he suddenly exclaimed: "What a fool I am! I can settle it in a minute. Don't move." And, so saying, he dashed into the ball-room.

"We are fools!" exclaimed Dr. Legris. "This fellow has gone back for instructions; so the person who employs him—the author of the anonymous letter—is in the ball-room. I will follow him and see whom he speaks to!"

But no—it was too late, for at that very moment the man reappeared. "It's all right!" he said carelessly. "You can both go; it's just the same in the end."

As they left the dancing hall, the clock struck one. The economical administration of La Reine Blanche had extinguished the outer gaslights at midnight. The pastry-cook had put up his shutters, and all was dark and quiet in the streets. Not even a cab was to be seen on the Boulevard de Clichy, and it was only at a distance that a police officer could be perceived

making his lonely rounds. The weather, which had been bad enough all day, had now become perfectly frightful. A perfect tornado was blowing over Paris, twisting the young trees on the boulevard, hurling chimney-pots from the houses, and ripping the slates off the roofs. Still the night was not dark, and at times the moon peered through the clouds which were hurrying across the sky, its disc being mirrored in the shining pools of the sidewalks and the gutters.

But little did the doctor or Raymond care for the weather. They pulled their coat-collars up to their ears and silently followed their guide, who, with his hands in his pockets, whistled as he trudged along. On leaving *La Reine Blanche* he turned in the direction of Batignolles, but suddenly stopping short, he entered the avenue leading to the Montmartre or Northern Cemetery. It is a wide avenue, where funeral trinkets and emblems are sold of a daytime, but which has no other outlet than the portal of the cemetery, seen at the further end. The doctor was aware of this, and so, abruptly stopping, he called to the guide. "Where on earth are you taking us?"

"Just where I was told."

"I dare say. But that gate yonder must be shut, as it always is at night time, and except by retracing our steps there is no exit from this place."

"I dare say," repeated the man; "but you had better come on all the same."

"One moment," said the doctor, and hurriedly addressing Raymond in a low voice, he added: "If you knew me better than you do, it would not be necessary for me to tell you that I am not the man to draw back from a thing I undertake. But I confess that I do like to know what I am about. Our expedition seems to me a most singular affair. Excuse my questions—but nine times out of ten when a man receives an anonymous letter he knows what name to put at the bottom of it."

Raymond stopped with a gesture. "The letter may have come either from a mortal enemy or from a devoted friend—that is all I can tell you."

Dr. Legris smiled, as if quite satisfied with this evasive reply; and then, in a surly sort of tone he said to the guide, "Go on."

The man thereupon approached the gate of the cemetery, and was about to pull the bell, when Raymond caught him by the arm. "Take care," he said, "neither my friend nor myself are persons whom you can joke with, with impunity."

The man shrugged his shoulders. "I'm ordered to give you no explanation whatever," he said. "I've received my instructions, and I obey them. If you wish to conclude this affair you must let me do as I'm bid. If you're afraid you had best go back. It doesn't make the smallest difference to me. I'm paid in advance." And so speaking, he jostled some silver in the pockets of his velvet breeches.

"But——"

"There's no but—it must be yes or no—and you must say the word at once, for I've no desire to melt away in this rain. Still I must make one remark before we go any further. If you utter a single word it may cost us dear—you must keep very quiet. We are playing for heavier stakes than you imagine."

Dr. Legris leaned toward his companion. "Let us go on," he whispered.

"So be it," said Raymond, "and we won't speak except in a whisper."

The man thereupon rang the bell. Two minutes elapsed—a sound of footsteps was heard, two or three oaths were sworn, and then the gate was

opened. A man carrying a lantern, and apparently just aroused from bed, for his nightcap was drawn over his ears, appeared at the portal. "What do you want?" he roughly asked.

The guide pulled a paper out of his pocket and thrust it under the eyes of the man with the nightcap, who calmly hung his lantern on the bolt of the door and examined this paper, scrutinizing certain stamps it bore. "How many of you are there?" he said, as he finished.

"Three."

"Come in then."

They obeyed, and having carefully closed the door, the keeper asked: "There's no need of my going with you, I suppose."

"Not in the least," answered the guide.

"Well, then I shall turn in—so good-night." And thus speaking the keeper lounged back into his lodge, swinging his lantern as he went.

The man from *La Reine Blanche* watched him depart with an air of profound indifference; but when the door closed and all was dark again, he drew a long breath of relief, as if he had escaped some great danger. "Good-riddance to you!" he muttered, snapping his fingers. Raymond and his friend were more puzzled than ever, but he apparently cared little for this. "Here we are!" he gaily added, as he led them along. "Here we are!"

They were by this time at a few steps from the marble pedestal on which lies the bronze effigy of Godefroy Cavaignac. Before them, as far as the eye could reach, there stretched the immense field of rest—the City of the Dead. Certainly neither the doctor nor Raymond were accessible to those superstitious terrors which haunt weak brains—and yet, by degrees they felt that mysterious chill and awe caused by the presence of death, creep over them. At least, however, their guide did not lose heart. "The worst is done," he said; "but if we don't hurry now, we might as well have remained away. Come on!" And without the slightest hesitation, in fact as if he had been quite at home, the man turned into a wide avenue, on the right hand side, which was bordered by stately monuments.

Without an objection—without a word—the young men followed him. Where, they knew not, nor did they ask themselves, so utterly were their ideas disturbed by the strangeness of their situation. The rain had ceased falling, but the wind had increased in fury, and swept through the trees, which sighed and groaned like living things. The clouds flew across the sky, screening the moon from time to time. The shadows seemed endowed with vitality, and the white statues looked like ghosts amid the tall dark cypress trees. However, the party moved on—through several avenues, down several steps, then up a steep ascent, and finally stopped near the chapel, built by the Champdoce family.

"Halt!" exclaimed the guide. "We have reached our destination."

It was clear that he knew every foot of the ground, for he drew the young men behind a thick clump of evergreens, and bade them crouch down. They hesitated. "And what then?" asked the doctor.

"What then? Why keep your eyes and ears open, that's all you'll have to do. Look straight before you."

From the spot where they stood Raymond and the doctor could see some thirty yards in front of them, a portion of the cemetery wall, skirting the *Rue de Maistre*. The ground between them and this wall was level, and contained but one tomb, which was undergoing repairs. The front slab had been removed, and one could detect a narrow cavity. The workmen must have been there all day, and oddly enough, had left their tools lying about.

"And now?" began the doctor again.

"Now you are to hold your tongue and not move," answered the guide rudely.

Having reached this point in their adventure, it was not worth while for the young men to raise any objection, so they waited in anxious silence, but not without asking themselves if they were fools—if they were the victims of some practical joke. Was it possible that they had been brought to this cemetery in the middle of the night by an unknown individual whom they had met at a public ball, and who yet wore his masquerading costume? They were cogitating in this fashion when their guide suddenly started, and whispered, for the first time, with an air of emotion. "Hush! look at the wall!"

Above this wall a human figure now slowly appeared. It was that of a man, and it was light enough to see that he wore a cap and a long dark blouse. He sat himself astride on the wall and then drew up a ladder from the street, and carefully dropped it into the cemetery, securing it to the wall again as if preparing for descent. Raymond and the doctor hastily turned to their guide to question him. But he placed his hands over their mouths and murmured, "Hush! Not a word! Wait and watch!"

And presently another person appeared on the wall, dressed precisely like the first one. They seemed to be consulting each other; but at last they descended the wall, and moved about a little, evidently listening. Being finally reassured, they went back to their ladder, and probably made some signal, for almost immediately a third person appeared. So far as could be seen this third individual, by his air and dress, seemed to belong to a higher social grade than the others; he appeared, in fact, to be their master. He evidently questioned them, and satisfied by their replies, he, in his turn, made a sign to some one else in the street. The result was, that a moment later a woman's head rose above the wall.

"Well, well!" muttered the man from *La Reine Blanche*, "she is a cool one I do declare!"

The lady, for she was evidently no common woman, was dressed in black, and wore so thick a veil, that her features could not have been distinguished even in broad daylight. The gentleman offered his hand to assist her down the ladder, but she pushed him aside, and descended into the cemetery without help. The whole party now approached the tomb that was undergoing repairs, and passed so near the spot where the doctor and Raymond were concealed, that the two young fellows could hear each word that was spoken. "Here it is," said the man who seemed to be directing the enterprise.

"Very well," replied the lady, in an imperious tone; "then all we have to do is to make haste!"

As if they were only waiting for these words, the two men in blouses each took a forgotten pickaxe from the ground, and noiselessly removed the slabs of the tomb. This being accomplished, they both stooped, and with their combined strength raised a coffin. Standing beside the veiled lady, the well-dressed man was overlooking the work. "Now, *Madame la Duchesse*," said he, "you will see if I have deceived you. Go on," he added, turning to his men, who, with perfect ease and coolness, inserted their tools under the coffin lid and raised it with a strange cracking sound.

Then the lady, who was called *Madame la Duchesse*, darted forward, bent over the coffin, and plunged her arms inside. It was in a tone of wild, delirious joy, that she, at the same time exclaimed: "Empty! The coffin is empty!"

Motionless behind the cypress trees which screened them, the doctor and Raymond Delorge waited for a word which might reveal to them the meaning of this most extraordinary, almost unprecedented scene. They asked themselves what motives could induce people to scale the walls of one of the cemeteries in the heart of Paris, and violate the secrets of a tomb. But the word they waited for was not spoken. Without a syllable the lady and the gentleman turned away, and, ascending the ladder, disappeared over the wall again. The two men in blouses alone remained in the cemetery. They quickly readjusted the lid of the coffin, and placed it inside the tomb again, then they set the slabs in position, and rapidly effaced all evidence of the place having been tampered with. As soon as this work was completed they went off in their turn, taking their ladder with them over the wall. Of the scene which the doctor and Raymond had just witnessed, not a vestige remained to testify to its reality—everything had vanished as with one of those visions which haunt us during the night time and fade with dawn. It was high time, too, that the drama should end, for Raymond could bear no more. He grasped their guide by the arm and shook him vigorously. "Tell me," he said, "how dare you bring us to look on at this shameless sacrilege? Who are these people? Whose coffin is it that is empty? What have I to do with it? Give us your facts and names."

The man slowly disengaged himself. "You are off the track, master," he answered, in an impertinent tone. "The people who paid me to bring you here told me nothing of these secrets. I know nothing; but I have an idea that all you want to learn is inscribed on that tomb."

"Of course!" rejoined Raymond and the doctor at the same moment; and leaving their guide they hurried to the tomb, which was of simple aspect. The inscription it bore ran as follows:—

MARIE SIDONIE.

DIED AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-SEVEN.

Pray for her.

"Well?" ejaculated the doctor inquisitively.

But Raymond seemed utterly bewildered. "No family name," he answered, "and 'Sidonie' gives me no clue—for I have not the smallest recollection——"

"Don't trouble yourself," said the doctor; "I assure you that it is not worth while. Let us return to our guide."

This was easier said than done, however, for when they reached the clump of cypresses again their man had fled. They called—no answer. They listened—not a sound. They looked around—not a human being in sight. "We are nicely fooled," said the doctor, in a tone rather of anger than surprise; "fooled as if we were children."

"But this man——"

"Is far away, I fancy. Still, there's little probability of his getting out at this hour. We shall find him, no doubt, for I see no way of leaving ourselves." This was true enough, and yet a moment later the doctor cried: "Never mind, I have a plan, and its very audacity may bring success. Let us get to the gate again."

Unfortunately, they were so little acquainted with the cemetery that they had not the least idea in what part of it they stood. They wandered on among the tombs, and Raymond nervously exclaimed: "Suppose we were found here, how on earth should we explain our presence?"

That situation was indeed perplexing; but at last the doctor thought he recognized the avenue they had first taken. He was right; for on following it they soon beheld the *rond-point* and the keeper's lodge. "Now for it!" whispered the doctor, and he immediately tapped at the window.

"Who goes there?" called a voice from within.

"It's us, of course," answered the doctor, sturdily. "We want to go out."

"What, already? Your companion, who has just gone, told me you would stay till daybreak."

"We've changed our minds."

"Then wait a moment," said the guard, "and I'll be there." He was not very long, to be sure, in making an appearance, and he then at once opened the gate, exclaiming, "Till next time!" as the doctor and Raymond hastily passed out. M. Legris did not answer this remark, however; he was rubbing his hands, and then, as soon as the gate was closed behind him, he muttered, "We have our man."

III.

THE doctor founded all his hopes upon a single and a seemingly unimportant circumstance, which had totally escaped Raymond. On the road to the cemetery their guide had remarked: "Do you think it was for my own pleasure that I left the ball, just when I was enjoying it most, and had made a chance acquaintance?" From this the doctor leaped to the conclusion that this mysterious person would return to his interrupted amusement.

"Unless he thinks we mean to follow him," objected Raymond.

"That's just what he won't do! He thinks us shut up in the cemetery for the rest of the night. I'm only afraid of one thing—that the ball may be over."

It was not, however, for on reaching the *Barrière Blanche* they saw the windows of the dancing hall still flaring with lights.

"Shall we go in?" asked Raymond.

The doctor hesitated. "No," he replied; "in my opinion it would be unwise to do so, for, of course, it is to this person's interest to avoid us—"

"Yes," interrupted Raymond, hastily, "that may be so, but for ours he must speak, and I propose to shake the truth out of him!"

"Let me take the lead in the matter, my dear friend," replied Dr. Legris. "Believe me, we must act with the greatest possible caution. I, naturally, have more *sang-froid* than you; so wait here while I go in and cautiously reconnoitre."

At *La Reine Blanche*, as at all public balls at carnival time, there was a room where fancy costumes could be hired. The doctor at once went there, and, for the sum of three francs and ten sous, an old woman, who looked very much like a witch, placed a long nondescript garment of black alpaca, which she dignified by the name of "*domino*," at his disposal. This so-called domino was dirty and altogether unpleasant in smell, and at any other moment it would surely have repelled our fastidious friend. But this was no time to stand and deliberate, so, thrusting his arms into the sleeves, and pulling the hood over his head, he made his way into the ball-room.

Only some sixty or eighty indefatigable dancers remained there. The doctor looked about, and in a corner, seated at a table, he perceived the mysterious guide. Beside him sat a remarkable being in the dress of a Bayadère—a woman at once surprisingly ugly and excessively thin.

"Luck is on our side!" thought Dr. Legris, and leaving the ball-room, he got rid of his domino and hastened back to Raymond.

"Now," he said to him, "we have only to discover where this man lives and what his name is. To do this we had better take a cab and sit in it and watch until we see him leave the ball. As soon as he comes out we will tell the driver to follow him wherever he goes—whether on foot or in a vehicle. It is certainly an odd business we are engaged in, but I see no other way of finding out the truth."

Raymond agreed to the proposal, and scarcely had he and Dr. Legris installed themselves in a passing cab than their whilom guide appeared with the emaciated Bayadère on his arm. He had resumed his cloak, and his companion had thrown a red and black plaid shawl over her shoulders. The doctor at once peered through the window behind the driver, and pointed these two figures out to him. "Follow them," he said, "and don't let them suspect your purpose. If you succeed you shall have twenty francs."

"All right!" replied the driver with a wink, and they started off.

Day was breaking, and, as is usually the case after a tempest, the morning was a clear one. The street-sweepers were already abroad with their brooms, and the thoroughfares leading from the heights of Montmartre were full of workmen repairing to their daily toil. However, the man in the cloak and his companion were not disturbed by the jeers and jibes they encountered as they went along the Boulevard Rochechouart, but answered back good-naturedly. Their destination seemed a long way off, but finally, after turning innumerable corners, they reached the Rue Feutrier.

The cab thereupon abruptly drew up, and the driver, leaning towards his "fares," exclaimed: "Your maskers have entered that house!" And he pointed to a building of wretched appearance, above the door of which appeared a notice: "Furnished rooms to let." At the door sat a stout man, wearing a blue apron and smoking a matutinal pipe.

"Are you the master of this house?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, sir," answered the man, taking off his cap as he spoke.

"We want to inquire about a person who has just entered—a man wearing a cloak."

"Who was with a lady?"

"Precisely. My friend and I wish to see him on a matter of great importance—a matter which involves much money."

The landlord raised his arms with a despairing gesture. "Too bad!" he cried, "too bad!"

"What do you mean?"

"Monsieur Potencier—for that is his name—is no longer one of my lodgers."

"But he just went in."

The landlord smiled. "That's so; but he and the lady only went through the house," and moving aside he pointed to an interminable passage, which ended in another street.

This was like a pail of cold water thrown on the heads of the doctor and his friend. It was most irritating to have taken so much trouble for such a humiliating result. However, M. Legris was not discouraged. "If Monsieur Potencier is not your tenant, you can at least give us his present address?"

"No, indeed. He doesn't like to have people meddle with his affairs, and so he always keeps himself very quiet."

"So you can't tell us where he resides?"

"It's quite impossible."

The doctor pulled out his pocket-book and seemed to be looking for something. The three or four hundred franc notes which it contained seemed to multiply indefinitely as he fingered them. "It's a great pity," he said, "for Monsieur Potencier to lose so much money. But perhaps this may do. Send him this card, and tell him I wish to see him as soon as possible," and so saying he extended a piece of pasteboard, which was simply his own professional card:

DR. VALENTINE LEGRIS,
PLACE DU THEATRE, MONTMARTRE.
Consultations daily from one to three.
Free on Mondays and Thursdays.

One aspect of the doctor's well-filled pocket-book seemed to have made a profound impression on the landlord of the house. "I don't think," he said, "that I shall be able to execute this commission; but I will keep your card, and if I should happen to see Monsieur Potencier——"

"You will give it to him? Thank you; and now good morning."

Of course the doctor did not imagine that his card would call forth a visit from Monsieur Potencier, but he was one of those persons who never leave a stone unturned. "This man has escaped us," he said to Raymond as they went back to their vehicle. "I doubt if we shall set eyes on him again!"

"I don't know about that," answered Raymond, "for I have just got an idea. How did we manage to get into the cemetery? Was it not through a paper which he presented to the keeper, who, after reading it, put it into his pocket? Must not this paper have been a permit given by the Administrative Bureau, on some pretext which, of course, we can't divine, but which——"

"You are right," answered the doctor; "I agree with you entirely."

"Well, then, this permit must, of course, bear the name of the person it was given to, so that if the keeper still has it in his possession, and would permit us to look at it——"

Dr. Legris struck his forehead. "Why the deuce didn't I think of that before?" he exclaimed. "Come on quick."

But the driver was not disposed to take them any further. His stable, he said, was close at hand, and his poor beast had been on his legs all night. They lost more than an hour in looking for another cab, and fifteen minutes in hunting up a commissionaire who would take a note to Madame Delorge to explain her son's absence. Then, as they were worn out with fatigue and lack of food, they repaired to the Café Périclès, where Justus brought them a cup of chocolate. On entering they met the journalist, Peyrolas,

who was in the seventh heaven of delight, having published an article which would make a martyr of him, and send him to prison for a month.

It was not far from ten o'clock in the morning when Raymond and the doctor at last turned into the avenue leading to the cemetery. "We must be very cautious," said M. Legris, "and before we speak to the keeper we will look about a little."

They soon found that the precaution was a wise one, for hardly had they passed through the entrance gate than they saw a group of policemen and keepers talking together with extraordinary earnestness. "Look," said the doctor in an undertone, "something is going on evidently. Let us try and discover what it is. But take care——"

Assuming as far as they were able an air of indifference they slowly contrived to reach the outskirts of the group. An old keeper with a white beard had the floor for the time being. "I should have done just as my comrade did," he said. "How on earth could any one suspect such rascality? These men come in the middle of the night to the gate of the cemetery, they present a paper from the prefect which states that they are detectives, and are to be allowed to enter the cemetery at any hour. So of course they come in."

"But the permit was forged," said a police agent, impatiently.

"But how was my comrade to know that?"

"That is true, for the printed form must have been stolen from the office. Still the signatures and seals are all counterfeit, and so miserably imitated that any one ought to have seen it."

"You would have detected it, of course; but if a poor fellow is woke up at dead of night I hold him excusable for making a blunder."

To justify their presence near the group, Raymond and the doctor pretended to have much difficulty in lighting their cigars.

"But what did the fellows want?" continued a police-officer.

"Who can say?" answered another.

"All we can do now," whispered a third, "is to make a careful examination, and see if everything is in order."

"One thing is certain," continued the first speaker, "they can't escape. The police will be on their track at once, for the keeper remembers them perfectly. He declares he would recognise one of them anywhere. He was young, he says, and well dressed, with a full beard, parted in the middle. He was wrapped up in a very long overcoat, and wore a wide-brimmed hat and a white choaker."

The doctor grasped Raymond's arm, and drew him into the cemetery. The description he had heard corresponded with his own appearance, and indeed had any one of the group chanced to look round, Dr. Legris would have found himself in an awkward position. "This is a pretty state of things," he exclaimed, when they were out of hearing.

Raymond was quite in despair. "I shall never forgive myself," he said, "for the annoyance I have caused you. It seems to me that there is some fatality about me; for I injure the people I should most like to serve. I ought to live alone."

But the doctor's countenance was serene again. "If that be so," he answered, kindly, "you have all the more need of a friend with whose aid and devotion you can more firmly withstand mischance."

The words "friend" and "devotion" fell from his lips with all their admirable significance. But he was not fond of fine phrases, and detested effusive scenes; so, seeing that Raymond was sincerely touched, he added,

"But we will speak of this later on. At present we must attend to the matter in hand, which, it must be admitted, is becoming terribly complicated. We cannot now go to the keeper to question him—it would be the height of imprudence." He paused for a moment, and then resumed: "However, I do not yet give up the hope of finding a clue to the enigma. Let us try and discover the spot where we were at last night."

The cemetery was now divested of its nocturnal terrors. A haven of rest for the departed, it was, nevertheless, full of motion and life. People were constantly passing with flowers and wreaths of immortelles, while from a distance came the regular sound of pick-axes and the monotonous song of a gardener. Beside the paths the grass was growing green, the early spring flowers were blooming, and the bees were humming busily. As the two young men wandered through the labyrinth of tombs looking for the place they wished to find, the doctor suddenly exclaimed: "It has just occurred to me that if, as you say, the two Christian names on that tomb recall nothing to you, the family name, which must, of course, be inscribed on the register, might, perhaps, do so."

Raymond started. "But, doctor," he exclaimed, "we can't examine the register ourselves, now that we have learned that the permit was false."

"No; but we can send some one else——"

He paused, and, after looking round him, added: "This is the clump of cypress, I am sure, and the very spot where we stood."

He was right. They could see the tomb which had been so sacrilegiously profaned. It was just as they had left it—that is to say, surrounded by piles of mortar and refuse, with the workmen's tools still on the ground. At this sight the doctor frowned. He had hoped to find the repairs finished and the tomb entirely closed up again. Since the profanation could in no other way be securely concealed, he took it for granted that it would have been done. But no; the uneven stones, many of them half falling apart, at once told the story. Raymond realised this, too, for, in reply to his friend's exclamation of alarm, he said: "You heard what the keepers said—that they meant to inspect the cemetery at once."

"Yes, I heard them, and if they come here, as of course they will, these slabs in this disorder will at once attract their attention. They will begin an examination and discover that the coffin-lid has been forced open, and that the coffin itself is empty."

Raymond felt his brain reeling. "So that——" he stammered.

"So that if we are recognized we shall certainly be arrested, imprisoned, and accused of an odious and frightful crime. And we shall possibly be condemned to——"

"You appal me, doctor."

"Very possibly. But prove your innocence if you can. Tell the truth to any judge in the land. Tell him that, in compliance with an anonymous letter, you and I went to a ball at La Reine Blanche to meet an unknown man; that this man appeared in a carnival-costume, and that we followed him here; that he told us to conceal ourselves; that we saw four persons, one of whom the others called the duchess, pass over the wall, and then proceed to violate this tomb. Yes, tell this story to any judge. Why, he would laugh at you, and say you are mad; that no such thing could, by any possibility, happen in a civilized city like Paris." And without allowing Raymond to intervene, the doctor continued: "Besides, this is not everything. The authorities would ask if people usually erected tombs to receive empty coffins. We might repeat what we saw, but they would shrug their

shoulders, and finally turn on us and demand the body of this Marie Sidonie."

Dr. Legris actually turned pale as he spoke, so vivid did the danger appear, and overcome with unreasoning dread, he caught hold of Raymond's arm. "Let us go at once," he exclaimed.

As the doctor lost his self-possession, however, Raymond grew cooler and more composed. "Go!" he repeated. "How can we go? Do you forget that our description has been given? To hasten now—or even to appear to avoid observation—would be to denounce ourselves."

It was most extraordinary that they had not been noticed as they came in, for their appearance was singular enough. Their adventure of the night had left its traces on their weather-stained garments; their trousers were very soiled and muddy, like their hats, which after being covered with dust in the ball-room, had subsequently been drenched with rain. The doctor looked at himself, and then at his companion. "I am a little off my balance," he said, with a constrained smile; and yet you must admit that the most ordinary prudence requires that we should get out of this cemetery as speedily as possible. The longer we wait, the smaller will be the number of persons hanging about the gate, and the greater our danger will become. So let us arrange our clothes as well as possible, and then we will mingle in the first funeral procession that is going out, and hold our heads down as if we were absorbed in grief."

IV.

THE doctor's advice was followed, and a short time afterwards he and Raymond had passed in safety, but not without apprehension, through the dreaded portal of the cemetery. Once in the avenue they were safe; and yet they did not breathe freely until they reached the Café Périolès again. They ordered breakfast in a small room on the second floor—which Justus reserved for his most desirable customers—so as to be able to talk freely, and escape that terrible journalist, Peyrolas, who, lying in ambush behind the front door, insisted on reading his tremendous article to every new comer.

Under the influence of a juicy cutlet and some good Bordeaux, Dr. Legris was soon himself again, and as he filled Raymond's glass, he said, "I think this will be a lesson to us. In future we had better keep as far from that cemetery as the limits of Paris will allow. This another instance of the danger a man incurs in wearing a white cravat!"

But Raymond would not smile. As long as he had anything to do, any steps to take in this mysterious matter he had kept up his courage and energy. Now, however, he was in a state of prostration and merely muttered in reply to his companion: "Yes;—we shall never find out anything—I see it plainly enough!"

Dr. Legris shrugged his shoulders and finished his breakfast in silence. When he had lighted his cigar, however, just as coffee was served, he said: "You are mistaken, my dear friend—I think you will very soon puzzle out this enigma."

Raymond shook his head, and the doctor opened the door to satisfy himself that Justus was not listening outside, in accordance with one of his pleasing habits, and then returning to the table, seated himself again opposite his new friend. "Now," he resumed, "let us reason together calmly, and try to set our bewildered ideas in order, for I am inclined to believe that we have behaved like children. You probably have certain reasons which I

know nothing about for being so much disturbed. But I, on the contrary, have been affected in the most extraordinary way, when you take into consideration that I am a physician and a sceptic." At this point Raymond tried to speak, but the doctor hastily continued, "The truth is, that we both of us allowed our imaginations to run away with us. But that's over. Now I ask, why should we at once conclude that we are incapable of elucidating this mystery? Listen to me a moment." Raymond sighed. "Let us proceed methodically," resumed the doctor—nothing daunted. "First of all it is clear that this affair was of sufficient importance to induce these people to incur the very great risks they did. Their motive is what we must discover. So far we only know one thing—that the interests of the two principal parties were identical. The man triumphed, and the woman was overwhelmed with joy, as if at the realization of her fondest hopes. To all appearance they simply wished to discover whether Marie Sidonie's grave was occupied or not."

Dr. Legris paused as if expecting some answer or remark, but as Raymond did not speak, he went on—"The organiser of this audacious enterprise—the well-dressed man, the gentleman of the party—unquestionably knew that the coffin was vacant. If you remember, he exclaimed, just as the lid was opened, 'You will now see, Madame la Duchesse, that I have not deceived you.' She had evidently doubted, for otherwise she would not have been so exceedingly joyful when she ascertained the truth with her own eyes."

This point seemed to be so clearly established that Raymond was roused from his apathy. "Such being the case," continued the doctor, "the conclusion we are forced to arrive at is that somewhere in this world there is a living, healthy woman—a woman who is supposed to be dead and buried—Marie Sidonie by name."

He spoke these words in a tone of such profound conviction that Raymond started. "Then," said he, "we must also believe in some odious piece of deception."

"Precisely."

"But for what reason? Why——"

"I wish I only knew!" cried the doctor. "But on this point we have no clue. One thing alone is clear, which is, that the duchess had everything to expect, everything to look for from the existence of this Marie Sidonie."

For a minute Raymond was silent. "But," said he, at last, "I cannot understand what interest I am supposed to have in this plot. Why should I be drawn into it?"

This was precisely what puzzled the doctor, and he could find no plausible reply to the question. "How can I divine the reason," he answered, "if you cannot? Still, it is clear that you would not have been summoned to witness this apparently incomprehensible scene, unless your presence had not been considered indispensable by these people."

"But who are they?"

"People who know you well—for the anonymous letter not only alluded to the death of General Delorge, your father, but also to a woman who loved you. It is clear, too, that the person who wrote it was quite sure of your compliance, for everything was in readiness—even to the forged document which opened the gate of the cemetery. Another proof that they considered your presence of the utmost importance is that they allowed you to take a friend with you—a friend who could have no especial reasons, such as you might have, to keep the secret—and refrain from disclosing the whole affair

to the police." Dr. Legris tossed aside his cigar, which had gone out while he talked, and continued his course of induction. "I infer, therefore," said he, "that the writer of the anonymous letter must be the man we saw—the man with the lady who was called the duchess."

"I agree with you," muttered Raymond.

"I am sure of it; for it was perfectly clear to me that he suspected our presence, or rather knew that we were there behind the clump of cypress."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I have a proof which would satisfy the most incredulous jury. Recall when these two men in blouses came over the wall, and descended into the cemetery. What did they do?"

"As well as I can remember," answered Raymond, "they looked about and listened."

"To ascertain, in short, if there were any spies."

"Evidently."

"Then I am right. Now, don't you think that such rascals as these would have taken greater precautions and have been far more careful in their investigations if their employers had not previously said to them, 'Don't go near the cypress tree on your left, for I have placed people there who must not be disturbed?'"

"I see," muttered Raymond—"I see. Yes; I think that man was the writer of the letter."

The doctor was quite radiant; for, as a rule, it affords a man great pleasure to be able to display his peculiar order of talent. "Ah! that man," he suddenly cried, forgetting his oath not to ask a single question. "And who is he? Do you suspect any one?"

Raymond's face grew dark. "Doctor!" he said. But M. Legris calmly continued: "And this duchess, can you not give her a name?"

"I know several women who bear that title. The Duchesse de Maumussy, the Duchesse de Maillefert——"

"Then, perhaps——"

Raymond shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "This proves nothing," he exclaimed, "for it offers no possible clue to the reasons why I should have been involved in last night's occurrence. Do you doubt my word? Must I again assure you, on all I hold most sacred, that I am at an utter loss to understand the affair, and that I have never known any one by the name of Marie Sidonie?"

The young physician coloured. "Have I been indiscreet?" he asked. "Tell me frankly if you would like me to forget what has happened. Say the word, and I will never speak of it again to you."

But Raymond was already ashamed of his burst of irritation, and he caught hold of the doctor's hand. "Enough!" he cried, "there must be no half-way confidences with a friend like you. Come and dine with us this evening, and we will see if there is anything in my past life which can possibly explain last night's mystery."

Part II.

GENERAL DELORGE.

I.

ONE evening, in a rare moment of expansiveness, Raymond Delorge had said to Dr. Legris, "How wretched a man is when he has nothing to expect or hope! Here am I, not yet twenty, and if it were not that my death would kill my mother, I should long since have blown out my brains."

The story of this young man's life will explain his mournful despair. His father, General Pierre Delorge, had been what is called a "soldier of fortune"—that is to say, one of those military men who had no other recommendation than their merit and their bravery; no wealth save their swords, and each rise in whose promotion is the reward of some undoubted service or gallant act. The son of a cabinet-maker at Poitiers, who had served as a volunteer in 1792, Pierre Delorge, rocked in childhood to the music of the glorious legends of the armies of the First Republic, had, on his eighteenth birthday, entered a regiment of Dragoons. His education was very defective, but his mind was full of tales of battle, and he felt that he was of the same metal as those heroic soldiers whom his father so often talked about. Unfortunately, it was now the period of the Restoration—1820—and the sons of revolutionary artisans were by no means held in high esteem. For a long time Pierre Delorge had no opportunity of distinguishing himself, but he had determined to profit by the years of peace and the enforced leisure of garrison life to remedy the deficiencies of his education. That long hours which his companions spent in *cafés* over their punch bowls were by him employed in hard study; for he saved enough from his small pay to pay for teachers and to buy books. He was laughed at and called a recluse; he was ridiculed for his adherence to his duties, but he went on his way unheeding. He was a faithful friend, always ready to serve his comrades in an emergency; and his modesty and courage were such that they could not escape some recognition, even in these unfavourable times. The revolution of 1830 found him in Algeria, where he had risen to the rank of a lieutenant. After the fall of Algiers, where he behaved with great gallantry, he was decorated. He spent eight years in Northern Africa, and was present at all the more notable engagements. At Constantine he was wounded, and at Monzaïa also. He received the Cross of the Legion of Honour on the battlefield, and after a second and third promotion, he returned to France with his regiment in 1839. He was then thirty-seven years of age, and was allotted garrison duties at Vendôme, where, in consequence of the reputation which had preceded him, and the curiosity he aroused, he was presented to the ruling power of the town—Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau. This lady, who was some fifty years of age, had never married. She was thin and yellow, with a hooked nose like the beak of a bird of prey. She was as noble as she was proud, devoted to cards, and credited with being a great gossip. However, when any one at Vendôme touched ever so lightly on her faults, the reply was sure to be made: "Very true, no doubt; but then she is so good and so very generous!"

Now, she enjoyed this great reputation of generosity and goodness merely because she had for ten years supported under her roof the daughter of her deceased sister, Madame Elizabeth de Lespéran, and yet this was neither a spontaneous nor a voluntary act on the old lady's part. When the Marquis de Lespéran died, just a year after his wife, leaving no son behind him, Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau did her best to compel the rich Lespérans, of Montoire, to take charge of the girl. But these good, generous relatives were not disposed to embarrass themselves with their brother's daughter. One of the ladies of the family actually said: "The old witch had better keep the child!" and mademoiselle did keep her. "Poor as I am," she exclaimed, "I will keep her if it were only to make these people blush for their own meanness."

She kept Elizabeth—and at what a cost to the poor child!—for the old lady, disappointed and vindictive, made her niece's life a constant torture. Elizabeth never tried on a new dress without undergoing the most humiliating reproofs and hearing a long lecture on the coquetry of simpletons who think themselves pretty, interspersed with groans anent the excessive dearth of stuffs, and the extortions of dressmakers. The girl never put on a new pair of boots without hearing her aunt say to a friend, "That child would wear out iron itself. Roulleau, the shoe-maker in the Grande-Rue, finds her his best customer. And yet she ought to have some idea of the sacrifices I am daily making for her."

The situation would, no doubt, have been even worse but for a relative who came to see Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau occasionally, and of whom she stood in more terror than of her confessor. This was the old Baron de Glorière, a bachelor and a collector of articles of *virtu*, who had conceived a warm affection for Elizabeth. It was to him she owed the only doll she ever had—a doll to whom she confided all her childish woes, and it was he who, as she grew up, gave her an occasional pretty toilette and some little jewelry. He was not rich, merely possessing an income of a few thousand francs, with his Château de Glorière, where he resided. This château, it was said, contained many objects of great value—pictures, furniture, and bronzes; but the old collector would have died of hunger rather than have sold the tiniest article among them. "Don't be so severe with your niece," he kept saying to Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, and perhaps, she would have obeyed him had Elizabeth been less pretty. But the girl's brilliant beauty filled her with rage, and she did her best to hide it. Elizabeth's shapely figure was clad in plain, ill-fitting garments, but she could not conceal its grace. Her hair was superb, and her pretty little hands, in spite of the rough duties they were condemned to, were still delicate and white. Even the exquisite shape of her foot could be detected, despite the clumsy shoes she wore. "Any other girl would certainly have the small-pox!" grumbled the old lady, as she looked at her niece discontentedly; and in fact, she would have been delighted if this ailment had disfigured the poor child for life.

It was at one of this charitable relative's soirées, enlivened by stale cake and gooseberry syrup, that Elizabeth de Lespéran appeared for the first time to Pierre Delorge. The word "appeared" is advisedly used, for he was, as by a celestial vision, fascinated and entranced. Then he was struck by the poor orphan's modest grace, by her sweetness of disposition, and by the dignity with which she endured her aunt's ill treatment. His heart ached at the manner in which the habitués of the house spoke to her, and it was touched by the reserved and almost haughty air she adopted. When he left Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau's house on the night we speak of, instead of

returning home, he strolled along the banks of the Loire until it was midnight, although he knew he must be in the saddle at five o'clock in the morning. He felt the need of reflection, for a new idea had just entered his brain, and that was the idea of marriage. "Why should I not marry? My rank and my pay justify me in doing so. I can already keep up a modest establishment, and I have six thousand francs in hand to start with, while my pay will now go on increasing."

When at last he returned to his quarters, he for the first time in his life, perhaps, studied his mirror, and wondered what effect he produced on people who saw him for the first time. He was tall, well built, and had acquired just that degree of embonpoint which is becoming. His dark hair was brushed back from his bronzed brow. The honesty and loyalty of his nature could be read in his eyes; his moustache veiled without concealing his firmly cut lips. He gazed at the mirror, and did not think himself altogether ill-looking, still he did not wish to incur the risk of a great disappointment, and so, before aught else, he made some curious inquiries. He had no difficulty in ascertaining the exact position of Elizabeth de Lespéran. "Not having a sou," said some one, "she will die an old maid just like her aunt."

The officer was delighted with this news, and he became a constant visitor at Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau's house, although the entertainments there were not of the most festive description, for the guests were mostly fanatical unmarried ladies of high birth, with an invalid or two, and several priests. But Commandant Delorge did not feel that he was paying too dearly for the innumerable games of Boston he was compelled to play, for they gave him an opportunity to contemplate Elizabeth at his ease, and he occasionally found means of conversing with her, though he did not dare to touch on the subject which was never out of his mind. At last, however, he began to think, from the fleeting colour which came to the girl's cheeks whenever he called at the house, and from the fact that a certain shutter was gently moved whenever he passed by on horseback, that she was not unkindly disposed towards him. He was indeed now only waiting for some favourable occasion to declare himself, when, towards the end of February, he fancied that Elizabeth was losing her beautiful complexion, and that dark circles were gathering under her big blue eyes. He did not rest until he had discovered the reason of this change. The fact is, a new notion had taken possession of Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, who, on the pretence that she could not sleep, now insisted on her niece reading to her the greater part of the night. In the morning the old lady pulled up her eider-down quilt and slept till noon, but poor Elizabeth was obliged to rise as early as the servants. Thus she did not obtain more than three or four hours' sleep of a night.

When Pierre Delorge heard this, he burst into such a rage that his orderly fled in fear from the room. "This must stop," muttered the commandant, "for otherwise the old woman would kill her."

Accordingly on the next day, it was a lovely afternoon, the young officer presented himself before Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, and, without any preamble, abruptly exclaimed: "Mademoiselle, I have the honour to ask you for the hand of your niece, Mademoiselle Elizabeth de Lespéran." And thereupon, without waiting for a reply, he gave the old lady an account of his means, his origin, and hopes for the future.

Intensely surprised, Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau examined him as if he had been a natural curiosity. "But," said she, "the child has not a sou—no dowry whatever."

Without being in the least disconcerted, the commandant replied, that this made no difference to him, and that he was aware of it, besides. The old lady was more amazed than ever, but she terminated the interview by declaring, that she must have some time for decision.

The fact is, that she was utterly upset at the idea of losing Elizabeth. What would become of her if this submissive slave were freed from her tyranny—if this resigned victim were stolen from her? Who would take care of her if she fell ill? Who would mend her lace and help in making her dresses? Why this niece of hers was worth three servants. "No, this marriage shall never take place," she exclaimed, as soon as Commandant Delorge had gone off; and she at once turned her mind to thinking of some good reason of withholding her consent.

She soon found one. What! Could the son of a Poitiers artisan, a mere soldier of fortune, marry the daughter of the noble Marquis de Lespéran? "Never!" she cried. "Never." It is simply preposterous! My sister would rise from her tomb at the very thought!"

Unfortunately for Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, her feelings were not shared by her niece, who, when she saw the commandant arrive, in full uniform, at so unusual an hour, was gifted with a perception of the truth. Without an instant's delay, or stopping to discuss the impropriety of an act which she would have unhesitatingly condemned an hour before, she darted like lightning into a small room connected with the *salon*, whence she could hear all that was said by the commandant and her aunt. So great was her agitation that she was very nearly caught by Pierre, but she retreated in season and repaired to her room, locking herself inside. "What will my aunt say?" she asked herself, over and over again. "When will she give her answer, and what will it be?" Alas! Elizabeth knew her aunt too well to doubt her decision. "She will reject him!" she cried in an agonizing voice. "He will think himself disdained, and I shall never see him again. What shall I do?"

She reflected for a moment, and inspiration coming to her, she wrote this laconic note to Monsieur de Glorière:—"My Dear Good Friend,—You will render an immense service to your little friend if you will call here at once, this very day—as if by chance—to see my aunt. I can safely leave everything else to your prudence and discretion.

"ELIZABETH."

However, it was one thing to write this note, and another to send it. The difficulty was to have it immediately taken to the Château de Glorière, which was a full league distant from Vendôme. However, with an audacity that surprised herself, Elizabeth sent her aunt's one servant to fetch a boy in the neighbourhood who occasionally did errands for the house. He soon appeared. "Do you know where the Baron de Glorière lives?" she eagerly asked him.

"Oh, yes," answered the lad.

"He must have this letter within an hour. Mind you only give it to him. Now, hurry!" And to impart strength to the boy's legs, she placed in his hand a silver piece, all she possessed in the world. "Heaven grant," she said to herself, "that Monsieur de Glorière may be at home."

And he was at home. Wrapped in his large-flowered dressing gown, the old collector was engaged in dusting his rare pictures and idolized china when Elizabeth's letter reached him. He read it at a glance.

"Ah!" he muttered, "prudence and discretion! What does that mean?" However, as soon as the lad had gone, he hurriedly dressed himself, deter-

mined to repair with all possible speed to Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau's house, "for it is very evident," he said, "that something strange has happened. What can this disagreeable old maid intend to do to my poor Elizabeth?"

The disagreeable old maid was by no means pleased when, some four hours or so after Commandant Delorge's departure, she saw the Baron de Glorière enter her drawing-room. However, he shewed himself very amiable, and hid his anxiety under the frankest smiles. For a moment she thought of saying nothing about the request for her niece's hand; but on reflection she decided that it would not do to hide the secret from the most influential member of the family, so she told the story slowly and reluctantly.

As soon as the baron understood what she meant, he interrupted her, exclaiming: "God is good! I never dared hope that our little niece would have such luck as this."

"Luck! Why, the man is the son of a common mechanic."

"Who cares what his father was? The son himself is a gallant soldier, and has a noble heart."

With an air of great dignity, Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau undertook to express *her* opinion to the baron. But it was loss of time. "I fancy," he rejoined, "that if you were twenty years younger, and if this handsome soldier had come for you instead of for Elizabeth, you would not look upon him as so audacious!" The old lady choked down the angry rejoinder which half rose to her lips. "As for myself," continued the baron, "I am going to tell this gallant gentleman what I think of the matter." And, disregarding the old lady's expostulations, he took his leave.

By a wonderful chance, just as Monsieur de Glorière left the drawing-room, Elizabeth was passing through the hall. He took her by the hand, and in a tone of indulgent raillery, exclaimed: "Ah! Ah! Miss Cunning! so you like the gallant soldier. Well, well, there is no need of blushing so furiously; you can rely on me!" And, so saying, he went off.

As he passed through the street he talked steadily to himself. "This good Demoiselle de la Rochecordeau is becoming absolutely unendurable. How can she have been so blind! Did she suppose that the mere charm of her soirées attracted this soldier to her house?"

Meanwhile Pierre Delorge was by no means in a comfortable state of mind. He knew something about what Elizabeth had to endure from her aunt, and he naturally anticipated difficulties. As he saw the Baron de Glorière enter his modest rooms, he grew very pale. "Well," he hastily exclaimed, without a preliminary good-morning.

"Well," answered the baron, "I have come to tell you that Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau does not seem inclined to give you her fair niece's hand."

The poor commandant turned pale.

"But I also wished to say that you need not despair. The old lady is not the sole mistress of the situation. The family have a voice in the matter, and as I claim to be one of the council, you may count on me."

Pierre Delorge began to express his earnest thanks, but the baron quickly put a stop to them. "You may thank me coming out of church," said he. "In the meantime, we must keep our eyes open, for the old lady is very shrewd. We will, therefore, go out for a walk together, and then you will dine with me at the hotel. After dinner you must take me with you to the officers' club, and I will play a game of checkers with your colonel, who, I hear, plays wonderfully well. Now, as I am a near relative of Mademoiselle de Lespéran, and as we have never been seen together before, the good

gossips of this town will at once scent something new, and infer that you are going to marry her. Public opinion will be with us, and that is a great point in a place like this, and has effected a good many marriages already."

The baron's programme was fully carried out with precisely the results he had anticipated. Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau was still in bed on the following day, when one of her especial cronies arrived with the news that every one was talking of the approaching marriage of Mademoiselle de Lespéran and Commandant Delorge.

The old lady half choked with anger. "It is the blackest of treasons," she cried—"an act unworthy of a gentleman! I shall have an explanation with him, and I shall tell him precisely what I think."

However, she did not do so, for she began to realize that such a step would be the height of folly. Still, as she was not a woman to give up a point gracefully, she betook herself to solicitude, so as to think of some means of getting out of the difficulty. Why should she not take Elizabeth away? She and her niece might establish themselves at some watering-place until Pierre Delorge's regiment had left Vendôme. Such a plan would cost a great deal of money, no doubt, for expenses are heavy at watering-places; but the sacrifice seemed light to her compared to the thought of her loneliness should she lose Elizabeth. She smiled at the idea of the Baron de Glorière's discomfiture when he called upon her. He would be told that she and her niece were travelling, and would be absent for several months! It was a delightful dream, no doubt, but too fine a one to be realized, as the old lady soon discovered. The very next day she sent for her niece and told her to begin packing for a long journey, for they would leave Vendôme that very evening. But an extraordinary thing now occurred. The girl looked at her aunt and respectfully replied: "Excuse me, but I cannot leave Vendôme just now."

The old lady felt as if she were losing her senses. "You cannot leave Vendôme!" she stammered; "and why, if you please?"

"You know as well as I do, aunt."

"Explain yourself, if you please."

"Well, I wish to know what answer you intend giving to a request which was made of you yesterday, and which you promised to reply to."

"If Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau had seen one of the statues of the town church descend from its niche, she would not have been more astonished. How did her niece know anything about it? and how, knowing it, did she dare to confess her knowledge? "It is the height of impudence!" she exclaimed. "But at all events, Mademoiselle, if you wish to know my reply, hear it: I say, distinctly, that never, while I live, shall a niece of mine marry this low-born cur! Is that clear enough? Are you quite satisfied with my reply? and will you have the goodness to attend to our trunks with all possible speed?"

In vain, however, did the old lady try to re-assert her empire over Elizabeth; the girl's will, once as flexible as a willow wand, had suddenly become as hard as steel. Pale, with sparkling eyes, she began to speak.

"Forgive me, aunt; but——"

"But what?"

"Your decision is too hasty. You have not consulted any one. I am an orphan, and have a right to appeal to a family council!"

"A family council, indeed!" cried the old lady in such a rage that her very lips were white. "I should only be doing my duty if I took you by the arm and put you out of doors—if I drove you from under my roof!"

Her rage was so intense that Heaven only knows what she would have done if the baron had not just then appeared upon the scene. His unexpected presence seemed to have the same effect upon her as a cold shower-bath. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "you have come to gloat over your work, have you?"

He had just come from making a round of visits. He had seen every member of the family, and had brought from each of them a formal consent, in writing, to Mademoiselle de Lespéran's marriage with Commandant Delorge. "I know," said the baron, "that what I have done is a little irregular; but, if you prefer it, I can summon a family council in due form."

"It is quite unnecessary," muttered Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau; and, as she dropped on to a chair, tears of rage rolled down her hollow cheeks.

So great seemed her grief that Elizabeth began to regret her firmness. All the humiliations which she had undergone for twelve long years were effaced. She only remembered the hospitality she had received. The old lady had the game in her hands at that moment. With one word, with one hypocritical caress, she could have riveted the chains anew, and have indefinitely retarded the marriage. But as the young girl, much moved, hurried towards her, she angrily exclaimed: "Leave me—leave me! You triumph to-day, but your joy will not last. God punishes ingratitude, and He will punish you through your husband. May you be as miserable as you deserve to be! As for the little I have to leave behind me, you may now say farewell to it, for not a halfpenny will you ever see." Then, turning to the baron, she continued: "Elizabeth's relatives have, of course, the right to give their consent to her marriage, but I do not think they can impose the objectionable society of this man Delorge upon me in my own house. I shall, therefore, be infinitely obliged if you will point out to me the speediest possible means of ridding myself of this refractory niece of mine."

The baron coldly bowed. "I foresaw this question," he said, "and I have made all necessary arrangements."

It was, indeed, at Glorière that the lovers saw each other during the few weeks which now elapsed prior to their marriage. What weeks these were, and how dear the memory of them proved throughout their lives! How often did the commandant live these days over again. He remembered how fast he rode after morning parade, how he espied a white shadow afar off among the trees, how, leaping from his horse, he offered his arm to Elizabeth, and then how lingeringly they walked up the shady avenue to the house, from the open doors of which came the sound of a cheery voice exclaiming: "Make haste, little ones. My poor François has announced breakfast three times already."

It was the baron who spoke, and coming out on to the steps he cordially shook hands with the commandant, and led the way to the dining-room, a lofty apartment, surrounded with dressers and buffets, decked out with specimens of every kind of *faïence* and porcelain, purchased piece by piece by the indefatigable collector. After their meal the lovers wandered over the grounds of Glorière—a simple home, but embowered among superb trees, with magnificent mossy rocks and sloping banks near at hand, and a lovely view of the river. The baron usually excused himself on the pretence that he had something to do with his collection, and the lovers sat in some shady corner and talked of the happy future before them. What had they to fear

now? Nothing whatever. Fate smiled upon them, and they had but little ambition—little care for worldly honours, fashion, and wealth. Still, at times a cloud settled over Elizabeth's face, and Pierre would say to her tenderly, "You are thinking of your aunt?"

He was right; for it was not without bitter tears that Elizabeth de Lespéran had bidden the dreary house at Vendôme, where she had been so unhappy, good-bye; and she felt a certain vague and unreasoning self-reproach for having left it. Her aunt's last words were by no means cheerful ones—"May you be as miserable as you deserve to be," and they haunted her like a terrible dream, and awakened a vague apprehension, which was like a spot on her sun—a shadow on her happiness. "What wouldn't I give," she said to Pierre, "if my aunt would only be reconciled to us and come to our wedding."

"Unfortunately, my love," urged the commandant, "she has prevented us from holding out the olive branch by accusing us of manœuvring for her fortune. Believe me, we have nothing to do but forget her, as, on her side, she has probably forgotten us ere now."

But in this idea he was mistaken, for the old lady was busy thinking of her niece, and if she gave no sign of life, it was merely because she had not yet lost all hope of revenge. She had ascertained that a clause of the army regulations forbids an officer to marry unless his bride brings him a marriage portion of twenty thousand francs. "Now," said Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau to herself, "where can these two lovers pick up twenty thousand francs? Elizabeth hasn't a sou, and the commandant has merely six thousand francs, which will not more than suffice for the *trousseau*, the *corbeille*, and the wedding."

However, the old maid was again mistaken. Delorge was not the man to start on an enterprise without foreseeing all its consequences, and, knowing Elizabeth's poverty, he had taken all needful precautions. His father, after fifty years of hard toil, had acquired a small estate near Poitiers, which he let for four hundred crowns a year, and which was valued at sixty thousand francs. Accordingly, Pierre wrote thus frankly to his father: "I love a young girl who is an orphan, and poor. The only obstacle to our marriage is that she does not possess the dowry which is required of an officer's wife—twenty thousand francs. Are you willing to give her the title deeds of your estate? You will understand that it is a mere formality, and will in no way diminish your income from Les Moulineaux."

To this application the old cabinet-maker at once replied: "Why do you ask me the question? Les Moulineaux belongs to you quite as much as to me, and you are at liberty to do precisely as you choose with it. You know that I am very well off, for every year I save more than a third of my income. Embrace your bride for me, and tell her that I shall send her a pair of diamond ear-rings worthy of the wife of an officer of your position."

And so thus the marriage of Pierre Delorge and Elizabeth de Lespéran was solemnised one sunny day in May, 1840. The previous evening Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau had taken to her bed.

"I have lost all hope," she said to one of her friends. "I know Elizabeth. Her husband will beat her, and she will be wretchedly unhappy."

II.

POOR old maid! She was again mistaken, for the commandant did not beat his wife. From the day of their marriage they enjoyed in all its fulness the intense happiness they had dreamed of under the trees at La Glorière. Outside annoyances connected with Delorge's profession had lost their power to vex him for any length of time; and when, contrary to his expectations and the rules of the service, his regiment was changed twice in one year, from garrison to garrison, his wife on her side gaily exclaimed: "It doesn't matter as long as we can be together!" And at other times she would smile and sigh as she murmured: "I am glad of those worries, for we are so happy that I am sometimes absolutely frightened."

And this was true enough; for Madame Delorge was haunted by vague apprehensions, particularly during the earlier months of her married life. In vain did her husband laugh at her. She had suffered too much as Elizabeth de Lespéran to be quickly reassured by the happiness she enjoyed as Pierre's wife. Often, when she was alone, she compared her past with her present, and at the memory of certain privations she had endured and the humiliations which had been inflicted upon her, the tears rushed to her eyes, and she sobbed bitterly. One day her husband abruptly entered the room, and was dismayed at the pitiful sight. "What is the matter?" he cried.

But the sight of him—his very voice—at once brought back her smiles again, and throwing her arms round his neck, she answered: "Nothing, dear. I am foolish and very happy."

By degrees, as she realised that the past was indeed the past, her nerves relaxed, and she grew calm and content. As a woman she kept all the promises of her girlhood, and was generally beloved, even in the regiment, where not a voice was raised in criticism of her conduct. This was singular and unusual, inasmuch as a regiment is simply a perambulating village, with a flagstaff instead of a steeple, full of gossip and curiosity, and dragging with its baggage through France all the petty feminine jealousies and spite which, taken up by husbands and brothers, become good solid hates. The happiness of the commandant and his wife became complete when God sent them a son, whom they named after the good friend they had not forgotten, the Baron de Glorière. He consented to leave his treasures and inspect the new arrival, and was rewarded for his compliance by discovering quite a mine of curiosities at Pontivy, where the regiment was stationed at the time of the boy's birth. The baron brought some news of Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, who was daily becoming more and more of a devotee, and changed her servant twice a week, for her increasing religious fervour did not at all seem to have improved her temper, though, on the other hand, her health had never been better. "You will see," said the baron, "she will end by burying us all."

The old gentleman went home again with evident reluctance, and made the commandant and his wife swear that they would come every summer and spend at least a fortnight with him at Glorière. "If you do not come for your own sake, or for mine," he said, "come at least for my godson's health—he'll grow up like grass in the country air!"

On the night of their old friend's departure, the Delorges seemed to find their house very empty. How much more so would it have been the case had they known it was the last time they should ever see him! And yet it was so; for only two months later, while standing on some steps dusting a

picture, he overbalanced himself and fell to the ground. When François, his faithful valet, reached him, he had ceased to breathe. "It is an avenging Providence!" sighed Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau, piously, on hearing of the baron's sudden death. "God grant peace to his soul! There's one rascal less in the world!"

This rascal, as it happened, left a will which appointed Madame Pierre Delorge, *nee* Elizabeth de Lespéran, his sole legatee, and with it there was a letter addressed to the commandant and his wife. "My mind will be at rest, my dear children," wrote the baron, "when I have arranged all my worldly affairs. I am growing old, and no one knows what may happen at any time. My sight and my judgment are alike weakened, for I actually bought a wretched copy the other day for a genuine Breughel de Velours. As I love you better than aught else in the world, I bequeath to you all I possess. First, my little income from well invested funds—three thousand two hundred francs. My Château de Glorière, as it stands and with all it contains. Do not thank me for it. I know that you will always prize the spot where under the old elms you two learned to love each other. You would never allow Glorière to pass into strangers' hands. If it entered the market, I am sure that fat old silk mercer in the Rue de l'Hôpital would buy it, and then his giggling daughter would drive away my ghost. My collections are very dear to me. They have been the charm and occupation of my life, and yet I wish to sell them. The wandering life you lead would prevent you from having them with you; and if they were left at the château under the care of François—faithful as he is—they would come to grief. I have, however, selected and numbered—as you will see in my will—some sixty pieces, the most valuable in my collection—pictures and bronzes—which I beg you to retain. They will, of course, be cumbersome in moving from place to place, but they will impart a home-like cultivated look to the apartments you may occupy. As for the rest, sell them with as little delay as possible, and if you honour my memory, at the highest possible price. No one must ever say that my collection was a two-and-sixpenny affair. If you take my advice, you will have the sale at Tours, where my collection is already known, and where at least twenty amateurs reside. Have the sale bills well posted at Blois, Orleans, and Le Mans, and spare no expense in newspaper advertising. Is this all I have to say? Yes. Then, dear children, farewell. Talk to little Raymond sometimes of your old and most affectionate friend,

"RAYMOND D'ARCES,
"Baron de Glorière.

"P.S.—I wish that my faithful servant François may spend the rest of his days at Glorière, with an annuity of four hundred francs."

Commandant Delorge's eyes were full of tears when he finished reading this feeling letter. "This is the first sorrow we have known since our marriage," he said to his sobbing wife, who was leaning over his shoulder. "And it is a great one, for such a friend can never be replaced."

After considerable perplexity and a long consultation, the commandant applied for a fortnight's leave, and started for Vendôme to carry out the baron's wishes. Brief as the interval was, he found that the baron was nearly forgotten. But people woke up once more when one morning they found the walls covered with huge placards, on which appeared the following announcement in huge letters:—"GREAT AUCTION SALE of *Antique Furniture—Valuable Pictures—Engravings—Bronzes—Faïences—Tapestries, Arms and Books*, comprising the collection of the late **BARON DE GLORIÈRE.**"

The mere idea of this sale, which was announced to take place at the end of the month at Tours, made all the people of Vendôme laugh aloud. "So it seems, then," said one of them, "that this eccentric old man's heirs seriously believe that he amassed some valuable things at Glorière!" And others, shaking their heads, answered: "They will find themselves much mistaken, then, for the things won't fetch a thousand crowns. But they ought to have been sold here. The expense of advertising and removal will be enormous and absorb all the proceeds!"

But this was not the commandant's opinion; he had been often struck by the beauty of certain objects in the collection, though he was nothing of a connoisseur, and he also had too much confidence in the baron's intelligence and shrewdness to believe that he could have so strangely overrated the value of his treasures. However, the interest he took in the sale, and the care with which he managed its details, were really not so much prompted by personal motives as by respect for the memory of his old friend. "The more they sell for," he said, "the greater will be the stupefaction of these simpletons, who now look upon the baron as a half-witted lunatic!"

The commandant's only mistake was that he expressed these sentiments before persons who did not understand them, and who, as soon as he had turned his back exclaimed to each other, "What nonsense! Does this man fancy he fooled us with all this display of disinterestedness. He thinks us too simple by half!"

In the meantime, all the objects appointed by the baron had been carefully put aside, with at least a hundred more, selected from among the tapestries, pictures, and weapons. The remainder on being offered for sale cleared one hundred and twenty-three thousand five hundred francs. "And observe, commandant," said the expert who had come down from Paris, "observe that you have taken out the cream of the collection. The things you retain are worth more than all those we have sold. I am myself ready to give you this moment thirty thousand francs for four of your pictures at my choice."

The fabulous result of the sale caused a profound sensation at Vendôme. The persons who had most ridiculed the baron's mania were thunderstruck. "By Jove!" they muttered, "it is not such a bad thing as it seems to pick up old curiosities!" And from that day forth Monsieur Pigorin, the fat silk mercer, adopted the habit of calling every afternoon at the second-hand shops in the town, hoping to pick up some of these wonders which lucky people buy for ten sous, and sell again for as many thousand francs. Mademoiselle de la Rochecordeau had taken to her bed, as she always did when especially annoyed. "Who would ever have fancied that the eccentric old animal at Glorière possessed a fortune!" she muttered. "My niece found it out, it seems! Trust her for that. Well, well! They thoroughly fooled the old man, and now they have their reward! How they must laugh!"

The commandant did not laugh, however, but felt sincerely grateful to the good old man who, after insuring the happiness of his life, had also endowed him with that blessed sense of security for the future. "If I die on the field of battle now," he said to himself, "or by an accident, my last moments will not be embittered by the thought that I leave my wife and child without bread."

Thus it was with pious tenderness that Madame Delorge and her husband hung up the pictures and arranged the bronzes and china bequeathed to them by their old friend. Their furnished rooms at Pontivy at once became not only home like, but as one of the officers said, they acquired by

the magnificence of these art treasures almost a regal aspect. However, in spite of the generally credited report, that Madame Delorge had inherited the fortune of a millionaire uncle, the household went on in the same way—and a very modest way it was; for two servants were all they kept, with occasional assistance from the commandant's orderly, an old Alsatian named Krauss, who had been with his master for four and twenty years, and proudly boasted that in all that time he had not been away from him during four and twenty hours. He was now quite as devoted to Madame Delorge as to her husband, and had constituted himself Raymond's guardian, watching over him with a mother's attention, a lover's jealousy, and the faithful submission of a hound. However, this did not quite please the commandant. "It will never do," he said at times. "Krauss will ruin our boy, and make him insupportably selfish."

The boy was a year old when his father was made a lieutenant-colonel, for those were the days when wealth was a claim to advancement; and Lieutenant-Colonel Delorge, who was said to enjoy an income of twenty thousand livres, was soon promoted to a full colonelcy, and ordered to assume command of a regiment at Oran, in Algeria. This order marred the pleasure with which he received the congratulations of his friends. Should he take his wife and child with him, and expose them to the fatigues of such a voyage, and then to the perils of such a climate? But at the first word of objection he uttered, Madame Delorge checked him. "I knew what I was doing when I married you," she quietly said. "I am a soldier's wife. Wherever my husband goes, I go too!"

Accordingly they departed together, and three weeks afterwards, such speed had they made, they were located in one of those charming houses with shady gardens extending in terraces above the ravine of Santa-Cruz. The colonel at once learned why he had been ordered to set out with all possible despatch. The colony was in commotion. Algeria and Morocco were in a state of insurrection. In fact a formidable rising was projected, with the view of throwing all the French into the sea, and re-establishing the former Mahomedan rule.

The son of the Emperor of Morocco was at the head of the enterprise, and had massed his troops on the banks of the river Isly, feeling so sure of victory that he had already selected the officers who should command in his name at Oran and Mascara. He did not take into consideration the fact that Marshal Bugeaud commanded the French forces, and preferred offensive to defensive tactics. Thus, Colonel Delorge had scarcely established himself at Oran when he received orders to move forward with his regiment.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when the order reached the colonel, and he at once turned to his young wife. "The regiment marches at midnight," he said as gaily as possible.

He expected tears and a despairing scene, but he was mistaken. Elizabeth grew very pale; a strange, fixed look came into her eyes, but she simply answered: "Very well." And then, without another word, she busied herself in preparing such things as her husband required. She forgot nothing, not even a bundle of bandages and some lint. More moved by her self-possession than he would have been by her tears, the colonel tried to comfort her. "Why do you attend to these things?" he said. "Krauss knows all about them." But she was not to be turned from her purpose.

The twenty thousand inhabitants of Oran were all in the streets that night, and wild shouts saluted the regiment as it left the town, with banners flying and trumpets sounding. Madame Delorge had not given way;

crushing down her choking emotion, and forcing a smile to her lips, she had embraced her husband once more as he put his foot in the stirrup, and then, holding up her boy, she said: "Kiss your father and say to him, 'Come back soon.'"

"Come back soon," stammered the child. Then came a final embrace, and the Colonel rode away.

Elizabeth watched until her husband was out of sight, and then, on turning to go into the house again, she fell unconscious on the ground.

"Don't be anxious," Pierre had said to her, "we shall be back by the end of the month." And he was right, for Marshal Bugeaud gained the battle of Isly a week later, with ten thousand men against thirty thousand. Colonel Delorge had two horses killed under him, and his garments were in shreds, having been literally torn to shreds by yataghans, though he himself escaped with only one wound in the right arm.

"I was sure you would come back to me," said his wife, when the regiment returned to Oran; "for if you had been killed I should have felt it here," and she pressed her hand to her heart.

The Colonel's wound was long in healing, for the fatigue of forced marches, and the excessive heat, had greatly aggravated it; and even when it was healed, there was an annoying stiffness about Pierre's arm which rendered certain movements almost impossible. As a reward for his gallantry, and in compensation for his wound, he was invested with important functions, which gave him an opportunity of displaying his excellent administrative abilities. It was to him that the Minister of War alluded when, in 1847, he said, in the Chamber of Deputies: "With officers like that, I would undertake to colonize Algeria in ten years!"

Thus, Colonel Delorge's reputation, both as soldier and administrator, was well established when the revolution of 1848 took place; and he thanked destiny for keeping him far from Paris when civil war was causing rivers of blood to flow. It was about this time that his wife gave birth to a girl, who received the name of Pauline. Madame Delorge was now perfectly happy—all her vague apprehensions had left her—her husband and her two children occupied all her thoughts. Poor woman! She should have remembered that fate is a pitiless creditor, and insists upon full payment.

III.

It was the end of March, 1849, and Prince Louis Napoléon Bonaparte was President of the Republic, when the military circles of Oran began to talk about three civilians who had just arrived from Paris and taken rooms at the Hôtel de la Paix. One of them was a young man of prepossessing air and manner, wearing a full beard, and calling himself the Vicomte de Maumussy. The second was older. His moustache was very long, and waxed to an appalling degree. He registered his name as Victor de Combelaïne. Both of these two gentlemen were decorated with the Legion of Honour. The third was a more humble individual, and also more difficult to estimate. He was stout and short, very ruddy and very bald. The extreme loudness of his appearance was increased by a huge gold chain and numerous rings on his fingers. Although he did not seem particularly old, his companions called him Father Coutanceau. The party had come to Africa, they declared, to obtain certain grants of land and inaugurate an agricultural enterprise. This may have been the case, but their conduct was

not consistent with the idea; for they paid little heed to the colonists, and devoted all their time and attention to the military men. And often at nightfall officers from distant parts were seen entering the rooms occupied by the strangers with a thousand precautions against being noticed; while, on the other hand, the mysterious trio were always driving and riding about, and even spending a day or two at a time with some of the officers in their quarters. They seemed, too, to have plenty of money—for they lived well, and drank the best Bordeaux and champagne.

"I am annoyed by these men," said Commandant Delorge to his wife one night. "One would think they were recruiting agents; but who can they recruit in this colony."

"Why do you not institute some inquiries," said his wife.

Inquiries were indeed made, and it was finally ascertained that Maumussy's name was really Chingrot, and that no one knew whence he derived his title of viscount. He was one of those individuals who hang on to young men of wealthy parentage, the young bloods who dissipate their fortunes before they have them. The culminating features in Monsieur Chingrot de Maumussy's career had been an elopement with an unfortunate woman whom he had ruined, a duel, and a spell of extraordinary luck at baccarat. After this he had steadily gone down hill, though he made certain spasmodic efforts to rise again, trying well-nigh every path in life—journalism, trade, politics, and stocks, for there were no limits either to his conceit or his ambition. It was true, moreover, that he was by no means deficient in intelligence, wit, and *savoir-faire*. He talked agreeably and fluently, with all the cool audacity of a man who has nothing more to lose. Accused of being always lucky at cards, and threatened by creditors, not with the debtor's prison, but with the House of Correction; blackballed at all the clubs, and turned out of the Bourse, Monsieur de Maumussy had suddenly disappeared from the boulevards in the month of February, 1848, since when his existence had been an enigma. Not less disreputable had been the life of his companion, Monsieur Victor de Combelaïne, on a lower rung of the social ladder—lower, because no one knew who he was, whence he came, nor even what was this gentleman's birthplace. No one, in fact, had ever heard of Monsieur de Combelaïne, his father. His mother, it was said, was a noble Hungarian lady. The only thing certain was that De Combelaïne had been a soldier, for he was known to have belonged to a regiment of hussars; and the trades people in the towns where that regiment had been quartered spoke feelingly of the bills he had left unpaid. In spite of all this, he owed to some mysterious influence a scandalously rapid advancement. He had attained the rank of captain, when in consequence of a scandalous adventure, the secret of which was well guarded, he tried to commit suicide. Being foiled in this attempt, he grew fond of life once more; but no one seemed very fond of him. Eventually he resigned his captaincy, some said voluntarily, and others under compulsion. Now the question arose in his mind how he should manage to live. At first he became a wholesale perfumer's traveller, next he opened some fencing rooms where he made money for a time. Then there was trouble again; one of his pupils was challenged, the master took his place, killed his adversary, and was compelled to leave the country. He took refuge in Belgium, where he became an actor, and at the end of ten months was hissed off the stage. Next came a brief period devoted to politics; and finally, Combelaïne adopted a profession which his enemies rightly called that of a spy. He had now fallen so low that he was ready to do anything for the sake of money. He was brave, possibly, but his courage

after all, was mere confidence in himself, and a feeling of absolute certainty that he could achieve his ends, stopping at nothing as he did. In his eyes murder was the merest trifle, at which he only hesitated when he thought the arm of the law would be swift with its vengeance.

Compared to these two worthy personages, Monsieur Coutanceau was absolutely saintly. He was in reality a commonplace rogue, who for fifteen years had devoted his life to criminal law, with such results that he himself passed several months in prison. He was consoled for this accident, however, by having well feathered his nest, and invested his ill-gotten earnings so that they brought him in an income of eighty thousand francs. Despite his air of good-natured indifference, he was in reality vain and ambitious to an extraordinary degree. Having escaped with his neck from certain disgraceful transactions, he had grown to believe himself a financier of great genius, and was quite ready to risk all he had to prove that such was the fact. Finally it must be stated that these three associates were connected with all the movements promoted by a well-known Bonapartist association, commonly called the Club des Culottes de Peau.

One morning Madame Delorge experienced great surprise, for standing at a window, she perceived the Vicomte de Maumussy and M. de Combelaïne coming towards her house. They asked to see the colonel, and were at once shown to his private room. What did they want? Madame Delorge did not even ask herself. Household duties had suddenly required her attention and she was busily engaged when she was abruptly startled by the sound of loud voices. She listened, and could hardly believe her ears when she heard her husband, who was apparently in the greatest possible rage, utter the most violent and appalling oaths. Almost immediately a sound of hurried footsteps was heard on the stairs—the visitors were apparently leaving in very great haste. The colonel was close on their heels, and as soon as he reached the hall he called out to his orderly: "Krauss, look at those two persons, and if ever they come here again remember that I am not at home."

Colonel Delorge must have been very angry, for two hours later, when he took his seat at table he had not regained his usual equanimity; and yet he was evidently fighting for composure. He talked more than was usual with him, and also with more vehemence, although the topic of conversation was unimportant. He was vexed with his boy for some childish blunder, and when Pauline cried he lost his temper entirely, and declared that it was impossible to think with crying children in the house.

His wife looked at him with boundless astonishment, for she had never before seen him in this mood. She dared not question him, however, in the presence of the servants; but when they had left the room the colonel himself was the first to speak. "How would you like to be the wife of a general?" he asked.

Like all loving wives, Madame Delorge was very ambitious for her husband, and supposing that he had some good news for her, she answered:

"Very much, of course; but why do you ask me?"

"Because they are looking for generals."

"Whom do you mean by 'they'?" she asked.

"Those two estimable individuals who were here this morning;" and without waiting for his wife to speak he continued: "This is the case. The officers holding the rank of generals are not enough for the present needs of the army. Bedeau, Bugeaud, Lamoricière, and Changarnier are in the way. New ones are wanted immediately, and from among them a Minister of

War will be chosen; and in order to court popularity we are to undertake new expeditions against the tribes."

His wife turned pale at the thought of the battle of Isly, and in a trembling voice she asked: "Are you going, Pierre?"

"If I receive my orders, of course. But don't be troubled; the orders will not come. I have none of the requisite qualities. So don't rely too strongly on being a general's wife, for since this morning it has become highly improbable that the honour will ever be yours." He rolled up his napkin as he spoke, tossed it on the table, and then pushing back his chair, hastily left the room.

"Mercy on us!" muttered Krauss.

This scene amounted to nothing perhaps, and in ninety-nine houses out of a hundred it would have passed unnoticed. But as a grain of sand falling into a pure mountain brook suffices to mar its purity, so did this brief violence disturb the peace and harmony of this happy home.

"There is no doubt about it!" thought Madame Delorge. "Something has happened, and I believe that these two adventurers have more or less to do with it." But in vain did her imagination try to establish any possible connection between the so-called Vicomte de Maumussy or his shady companion and her loyal husband.

These two personages had by this time succeeded in gathering quite a little circle about them. The vicomte was now regarded as a power in the political world of the colony. Monsieur de Combelaîne, invited to a fencing match, distinguished himself in wonderful style. On his side Coutanceau gambled, lost, and paid, with the best grace in the world. They gave dinners and good wine, followed by *soirées*, where boundless quantities of punch were served. But at last one day they went off as silently and as quietly as they had come. Madame Delorge breathed a sigh of relief, for she had instinctively learned to associate her husband's unwonted moodiness with their presence.

"Now," she thought, "Pierre will be like himself once more."

Not at all. On the contrary, the colonel became more and more absorbed. Preparations were being made throughout the colony for the expedition he had spoken of to his wife, but he did not yet know if his regiment would be included in it. It was not, and this proved a great mortification to both men and officers, who had confidently looked forward to winning promotion by gallant deeds.

"Our colonel is out of favour," they said among themselves. And of this they became still more certain when they saw several other colonels, of far less distinction, ordered off.

The powers that were, however, probably considered that it would be most impolitic to sacrifice a man so generally esteemed and respected as Colonel Delorge, and accordingly he received his promotion to the rank of General of Brigade early in 1851, and with it the order to return to Paris and report to the Minister of War. But his advancement seemed to irritate rather than please him; so much so that every one noticed the constrained smile with which he received the congratulations addressed to him on all sides. And that evening, when he and his wife were alone, he said to her: "Do you know what I ought to do if I had an ounce of common sense? I ought to send in my resignation, and we would go and live at Glorière. We have a large income now."

But she hastily exclaimed: "It would be the height of folly, and a thing you must not do, at least if I have any influence over you."

And Madame Delorge did have influence over her husband, for she induced him to relinquish the idea, already nearly decided upon, of leaving the service. She was well aware that she assumed a grave responsibility, but she did not shrink from it, so great was her love for her husband and her children, and so strong her wish to do her duty to both. No personal consideration influenced her, for, in fact, the proposal to return to Glorière thrilled her very heart and offered a thousand temptations. Her husband knew this well, and so her words had additional weight when she said: "Be patient, Pierre, and reflect well. Don't yield to a momentary impulse of discouragement, which you would be sure to regret later on. You can send in your resignation at any time, you know!"

Ah! if he had but told her the truth. But no, he remained silent, and they left Oran followed by their devoted servant Karuss.

On presenting himself at the War Office General Delorge learned that his new duties would henceforth keep him in Paris, whereupon he and his wife looked about in search of a suitable residence, and finally selected a pretty little villa surrounded by a large garden at Passy. The price they paid was high, but they disregarded this, on account of the advantages of the garden for their children.

A month later Madame Delorge began to repent having thrown any obstacle in her husband's path when he had wished to resign. He was still loving and tender, but she felt he was slipping away from her. He had so far never concerned himself with politics, and had often been heard to say that a country was in a perilous condition when its generals dropped their swords and took up the pen—and left their saddles for a seat in parliament.

It was, however, very difficult for him in his position to hold himself aloof from public affairs in that fatal year 1851. The uncertainty of the future and its risks were beginning to be profoundly felt in Paris. Every day some new and astonishing report was in circulation, justified by the conduct of the singular persons who now made themselves conspicuous. From every part of France there trooped to the capital like so many dogs scenting a new quarry, all the shady or blighted individuals who had failed in life—the withered fruits as it were of each profession—the disappointed and the scoundrels. Since returning from a diplomatic mission in Germany the Vicomte de Maumussy had been appointed to important functions. The papers named Monsieur Coutanceau for a prefecture—while the Comte de Combelaïne—for he had grown to be a count—occupied a confidential position near Prince Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, President of the French Republic.

What part did General Delorge take in the struggles of the times? Madame Delorge never knew, for the day had passed when she was the confidante of her husband's most secret thoughts. He never said one word to her of his secret plans and opinions. Whenever she asked him any questions, he answered them vaguely, or turned the conversation. Knowing him as she did, she realised that his mind was absorbed in something which, for some reason or other, he wished to keep from her. He rarely went out, but he received a great many visitors—among them numerous deputies. And finally in October she heard him give orders to admit one of the men whom he had formerly so ignominiously expelled from his house—the Comte de Combelaïne.

From that day forth it may be said that Madame Delorge vaguely expected some catastrophe, and it finally came on the 30th of November. The most trifling occurrences of that day were destined to be ineffaceably

engraven on the unhappy woman's memory. It was Sunday. The general rose in much better spirits than usual, and after breakfast, though the weather was cold and foggy, he went down to the lower end of the garden with his son to practise pistol shooting at a target he had had installed there. When at last they came back to the house Raymond said to his mother: "I missed the bull's eye six times, but papa hit it regularly, though he was obliged to use his left hand."

"Yes," added the general, "that confounded right arm of mine twinged frightfully to-day, and it is so stiff I can only move it with difficulty." And, sitting by the fire, he proposed to his wife that they should go together to the theatre that evening.

But while he was yet speaking Krauss came in with a letter. At the sight of the handwriting, the general frowned. He read the missive twice, and crushing it in his hands, he threw it into the fire, exclaiming: "No! A thousand times no!" Then he seemed to reflect, and a minute later he exclaimed: "Little wife, you won't have the pleasure I just promised you. I must keep an appointment which was indefinitely made, and which is now fixed for this evening, as this letter informs me." Then ringing for Krauss, he added:

"Have my full dress ready. I shall dress at half-past eight."

The general's gaiety had fled. He hurried to his private room and did not appear again till dinner time. At nine o'clock he sent Krauss for a vehicle, and, as he kissed his wife, he said: "I shall not be late."

Another moment and he was gone!

IV

So Madame Delorge was to pass this evening as she had passed many others of late—alone with her children. Pauline asleep in the next room, and Raymond preparing his lessons for the next day. Two things comforted her. The general had gone out in full dress, which seemed to indicate some occasion of ceremony. And he had promised to come home early. With this remembrance to cheer her, she determined to find something to occupy the long hours of waiting—hoping that she might become sufficiently interested to forget to look at the clock. When Raymond had finished his lessons she played several games of dominoes with him, and then sent him off to bed. At eleven she was alone in the drawing-room, and counted the strokes. "He will not come before twelve," she said, half aloud. Then to occupy her time she took up a book, but she could not become interested in it. She began to think of the happy days when her husband had belonged to her entirely. It then required some most extraordinary event to drag him away from her and his fireside in the evening; and if he were obliged to leave her, he always said where he was going and with what object. Then indeed he had no secret from her, and she did not feel that the meshes of some strange intrigue were gathering more and more closely around her.

At last the clock struck twelve. "He will be soon here now!" she said aloud, and then relapsed into her train of thoughts again. With strange persistency there flitted through her mind all the events which had followed the visit of M. de Maumussy and M. de Combelaïne to Oran, and in each one she seemed to detect their mysterious and fatal influences. The injustice with which the general had been treated originated, she firmly believed, with

these two men. Ah! why had she not consented to his resigning his commission.

It was one o'clock, and no general as yet. For a time Madame Delorge wandered restlessly about the room, and then went to the window and looked out into the darkness of the night. Not a sound disturbed the mournful silence of this quiet corner of Passy—not a rumble of wheels, nor a voice, nor the sound of a footstep. The night was very dark, and everything was wrapped in fog as in a winding sheet. She shivered, closed her window, and added a log to the fire. She asked herself if she and her husband had not made a mistake in taking a house so far from the centre of Paris. Passy, in the winter time after ten o'clock at night was the end of the world, and a cab driver could only be persuaded to drive there with difficulty. Perhaps at this very moment the general was impatiently looking for a vehicle. Perhaps he would even be compelled to return on foot. "No, he will come in a cab," she thought, "because he knows how foolishly anxious I always become when he remains out late."

However, in spite of all this reasoning she grew sadder and more and more disturbed. How dreary her once glad life had become! Her happiness and peace seemed to have flown for ever away! Why had she allowed herself to be thrust aside in this fashion? Why had she not torn this secret from her husband—this secret which evidently harassed him so sorely?

Two o'clock! She could not take her eyes from the clock. She counted each minute, each second, and again and again said to herself: "Before the large hand is there I shall hear his step!"

But the large hand, with its even, imperceptible motion, passed the fixed point, and still not a sound came. The unhappy woman thought of the letter which had deprived her of the pleasant evening she had promised herself. Where had this wretched document come from? What could it have contained to induce her husband to say with such fierceness, "no—a thousand times no!" At last she heard the church bell ring four o'clock matins, and, faint and sick with suspense, she staggered to the window again. "What can have happened to him!" she asked herself; and the idea of some terrible accident took possession of her mind. She left the drawing-room and entered the hall, which was dimly lighted by a lamp which was dying out. On one of the chairs sat Krauss—but he was not asleep; for, as his mistress's dress rustled, he started up, and in the same tone with which he would have answered to the roll call, he exclaimed, "Madame!"

The poor woman's heart sank. Why was not this man asleep—he who always dropped off whenever he had the slightest opportunity? Had he any especial reason for being anxious? "Krauss," she said, "do you know where your master went?"

"No, madame."

"Didn't you hear the address he gave to the driver?"

"No, madame," answered Krauss again; and then he added: "Nothing can have happened to the general, madame; he had his sword with him."

Madame Delorge turned silently away. She felt certain now that something terrible had come to pass. She entered her son's room and kissed him on his forehead as he slept. "Poor boy!" she said. "God grant that he will not awake to sorrow!"

The dawn broke gray and cold, and suddenly the ringing of the bell at the garden gate resounded through the house. "It is he!" she cried—for she thought she recognized her husband's way of ringing, and she was

darting towards the door when her strength failed her, and she sank on to a chair.

There she remained listening to every sound. She heard Krauss open the gate, which creaked on its hinges. Then she distinguished several voices and a sound of steps on the gravel walk. "It is very strange," she thought; "Pierre has not come home alone."

But the same steps entered the house—heavy steps coming nearer up the stairs—unsteady ones, as if a heavy burden were being carried. Mad with terror, she started to her feet. But at the same moment the drawing-room door was thrown open, and two men, whom she did not know, came in followed by Krauss, who was as white as the plaster of the wall against which he leaned.

"My husband!" she gasped.

One of the men, who was pale and trembling with emotion, advanced towards her. "Courage, madame," he said, with respectful sympathy.

She understood, poor thing; and in a faint voice murmured: "Dead—is he dead?" "Her eyes closed, as if she could not look the terrible truth in the face, but as Krauss started forward she opened them and waved him aside. "Take me to him," she said; "I must see him! Where is he?"

One of the strangers pointed to an open doorway, and Madame Delorge rushed through it into her husband's bedroom, which was lighted by a single candle alone. Upon the bed, the eider-down quilt of which had been hastily caught off and thrown into a corner, lay the body of General Delorge, already cold and stiff. His eyes were wide open, and his face wore a terrible expression of mingled hate and contempt. His coat was stained with mud and partially unbuttoned, and one of his epaulettes was missing. On a chair near the bed lay his cloak, his unsheathed sword, and his hat, the plumes of which were drenched with rain.

At this appalling sight the poor woman stopped short with dilated eyes and her arms extended, as if to ward off some terrible vision. She could not believe in the reality of what she saw. But this only lasted for a moment. She approached the bed and threw both arms around the inanimate body of the man whom she adored, as if, in her wild grief, she hoped that her embraces would restore life to the heart which for so many years had beaten only for herself.

"Poor woman!" muttered one of the strangers, in a tone loud enough to be heard by Krauss.

But at this moment she started back with a wild look of horror. "Blood!" she cried. "Blood!"

Her hands were indeed red with blood, and spots could be seen on the lace trimmings of her sleeves. "Ah! my husband has been assassinated," she added.

But the younger of the two strangers shook his head. "No!" he said, "you are spared that crowning sorrow. General Delorge fell in a duel."

"And after a fair and honest contest," added the other.

She looked at them both in turn without seeming to understand them, and then slowly repeated: "A duel—honest contest!"

Meanwhile the two men talked together in a corner. One of them—the younger one—was again the spokesman; he came forward and bowed profoundly. "We were charged," he said, "with a most fearful mission. We have fulfilled it, and, unless we can serve you, or you have some orders to give, we ask your permission to retire." He waited for a reply, and, as none came, he added: "Here is my card, madame, and I beg you to command my services whenever you may need them."

He laid a card on the mantel-shelf as he spoke, and then he and his companion withdrew, without any one in the room thinking of detaining them.

Madame Delorge was kneeling at the foot of the bed, holding one of the dear, cold hands. "Pierre," she murmured, "forgive me. It is I who have killed you. You foresaw this death the day you spoke of retiring from the world and living at Glorière. And I prevented you—poor fool that I was—and it was I who led you into the midst of your enemies——"

So agonized was her tone that poor Krauss could not bear it. He touched her lightly on the shoulder. "Madame," he said, "madame."

But she did not seem to hear him. "At Glorière we might have been so happy," she exclaimed—"and now this horrible, sudden death! I will not live without you, my beloved——"

Poor Krauss sobbed aloud. "She is crazy," he said. "She means to kill herself, and then what will become of the poor children and I?" He was praying for some help, some inspiration from Heaven, when suddenly he heard a loud cry of grief. He turned and beheld Raymond, who, aroused by the bustle, had come into the room. The lad hastened to his mother, and throwing his arms around her neck, cried, amid convulsed sobs: "Dead! My poor father is dead!"

Perhaps this was the poor woman's salvation. Her son's arms, his tears falling on her face, recalled her to herself, to duty, and to life. She remembered that she was a mother as well as a wife; that she did not belong to herself; that she had no right to die. She kissed her son tenderly, and for a time murmured soft, broken words. At last she spoke aloud again. "Tell me all you know, Krauss," she said. "I can bear it now."

The old soldier looked at her inquisitively. "What do you wish me to tell you, madame?" he stammered.

"Tell me how your master died, Krauss. There was a duel—but where, and with whom?"

"Alas! madame, I don't know."

"Didn't these men, who were probably the general's seconds, give you the particulars?"

"No, madame—none."

She naturally supposed that he was concealing something from her, and so, somewhat harshly, she rejoined: "I insist on your speaking, Krauss."

The poor fellow was desperate. "On my honour, madame, I know nothing. I was so overcome that I never asked a question. I hurried to the door when I heard the bell—a vehicle was there, and two men got out and asked if this house belonged to General Delorge. I answered yes. They then asked whom they were speaking to, and when I said I was the general's orderly they replied: 'Then we can tell you everything. Your master has just been killed in a duel.' I felt as if I were stunned, and answered, 'Impossible!' 'Not impossible,' said the men, 'for the body is here, and you must help us to carry it upstairs.' Then they asked if the general was married, and where you were. I told them you were up, whereupon they said that was better, perhaps, and that when we had carried the body upstairs they would see you, if you were willing. This is just what we did, and you know the rest."

As Krauss spoke, the widow's pale cheeks flushed with anger. "And is this all?" she asked.

"All, madame."

She waved her hand, and in a tone of bitter irony, exclaimed: "And this is the way of the world! A man fights a duel—he is killed—and his friends

—his seconds—perhaps the very men who pushed the matter to this climax—think they have done their entire duty when they have brought his body back to his house, where they arrive at daylight, and said to his widow, ‘Here is your husband; we have nothing more to do with the affair.’ ”

Krauss fully understood his mistress’s grief, but her indignation was beyond his comprehension. In his judgment, a duel was one of those accidents of life, like a fall from a horse or a cannon-ball—and if a man died it little mattered, in his opinion, whether it was on the battle-field or in his bed. As to the conduct of the two strangers, it seemed to him so natural that he even undertook to defend them. “Excuse me, madame,” he remarked, “but these two gentlemen asked you before they left if they could be of use to you.”

“I daresay; but I did not notice,” she answered, wearily.

“And one of them even left his card. Would you like to see it?”

“Yes, give it to me.”

He handed it to her, and she read aloud: “Dr. J. Buiron, Rue des Sausstayses.” A physician then had been present at the duel, or had been called in immediately afterwards. This discovery comforted the poor wife, for she fancied that some attempt had been made to save her husband. “We must see this Dr. Buiron again, and ask him for the particulars!” she said, whereupon Krauss turned to go at once. “Wait,” added his mistress, “you are needed here. I must send some else—and who shall that be?”

Madame Delorge had lived a life of great retirement at all times, but since her return to Paris it had almost been one of isolation. Devoting herself to the education of her children she barely saw anyone, and it seemed at first as if there were nobody to whom she could turn on this pressing emergency.

Krauss came to her assistance. “You know, madame, how much our neighbour, Monsieur Ducoudray, loved my master——”

“You are right, go to him,” replied the widow.

This M. Ducoudray was Delorge’s nearest neighbour, for a simple hedge divided their respective gardens. He was a man who had been in trade, and had retired after amassing a comfortable fortune. He had all the faults of the traditional Parisian of the middle classes, being endowed with mingled simplicity and cunning. He was sceptical and superstitious; obliging, and yet selfish; intensely ignorant, and yet always ready with his opinion on all subjects. By no means lacking acuteness, he busied himself with politics, found fault with every government, constantly advised a revolution, and was always prepared to take refuge in his cellar on the day it burst out. He was a widower, with one child, a daughter, married in the provinces. He was careful of his dress, looked younger than his years, had by no means lost the wish to please, and occasionally alluded to the possibility of marrying again. His intercourse with the general had begun with the flowers and vines they had exchanged; and after a time the two men saw each other every day. Being quite at home in Paris, M. Ducoudray was enabled to serve the general and his wife in many little ways. He enjoyed executing commissions, and he was delighted, for instance, when the general asked him to buy a stock of firewood for him.

Such was the man who, ten minutes after Krauss had gone for him, entered the drawing-room, where Madame Delorge was waiting. He was pale and trembling with emotion. “Oh! madame,” he cried, “What a terrible misfortune!” And the broken-hearted widow was compelled to listen to some of those well-meant condolences which fall on great sorrows like

boiling oil on live coals. "It is a very strange affair," said M. Ducoudray, "for it is not natural for people to fight duels in the middle of the night." Madame Delorge started. Stunned by the blow, she had not made this reflection, simple as it was. "No," continued the worthy man, "affairs of honour are not usually settled like that. Seconds are chosen, you know, on both sides, and these seconds meet and settle all preliminaries. At least this was the way things were done in my time."

When he at last stopped talking, Madame Delorge explained what she wanted of him.

"Certainly," he said, "I understand. I will take a vehicle at once and go and see this physician, and I will hasten back to tell you what he says."

He left the room as he spoke, and hardly had he gone than Krauss appeared at the door of the general's bed-chamber. "Madame!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice, "madame!"

The old orderly who had been so pale with anguish a moment before was now transfigured. Bright colour flushed his tawny cheeks and his eyes flamed angrily.

"What is it?" asked Madame Delorge in dismay.

"It is this, madame," replied the old soldier, with a threatening gesture; "my general was not killed in a duel!"

She did not at first grasp his meaning, but stared at him wildly. "Krauss," she slowly said, "what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say, madame. There has been no duel."

Madame Delorge started to her feet. "I am his wife—his widow! I am no coward! Whom have you seen? Who has told you anything?"

"No one, madame. But the wound tells me all. Listen to me, dearest mistress, and you will see precisely what I mean. You have seen my general and I when we were teaching Master Raymond to fence. You noticed that we each stood sideways so as to present as little surface as possible to our opponent. Well—in a duel the position is the same. Consequently, if one receives a wound it is on the side nearest one's adversary—that is to say, on the side of the arm which holds the sword."

Madame Delorge was listening breathlessly.

"Now," continued Krauss, slowly and distinctly, "if my general were to fight a duel which side would be present to his adversary? The right side? By no means. No; for since Isly he has not been able to use his right arm."

"Yes, yes! and yesterday he could not hold even a pistol in his right hand. I see—my God—I see!"

"Exactly! And when he fenced it was with his left hand. Very well, it is under the right breast, and well towards the side that the general received the terrible wound which killed him. This proof and the reasoning were clear. Besides," continued the old soldier, "I have another proof. Yesterday I buckled a new sword to my master's side, one he wore for the first time; and I am ready to take my oath that this sword has never been crossed with another."

"It is plain, then," murmured Madame Delorge, half fainting, "that my husband has been murdered!"

V.

For the second time this formidable accusation had passed the heart-broken widow's lips; but at first the words had been a despairing cry, which had escaped her almost unconsciously, when she saw the blood on her hands—whereas this time the charge was deliberate. "Krauss," she said, as soon as she could speak, "go to the police-office, and send some one to me at once!"

At this moment her little girl was brought to her, and the poor mother took the child in her arms and kissed her passionately. "Yes, my darling," she said, "your poor father shall be avenged. All the strength of mind and body which God has endowed me with shall be devoted to that purpose."

She could say no more—her sufferings were too acute, and she gave the child back to the nurse, bidding the latter take her away.

It was not long before the Commissary of Police arrived. He was tall and thin, with a large nose and small eyes. His gait, gestures, and voice all indicated that he had an extremely good opinion of himself. An old gentleman wrapped up in a fur coat accompanied him. This was the official physician who always attended on such dismal occasions. The commissary spread paper and pens with an ink-bottle on the table in a business-like way, and then, being seated, pompously exclaimed: "Madame, I am ready."

Rapidly, and as clearly as possible, Madame Delorge then laid before him all the particulars she knew of this disastrous event, mentioning in conclusion the astonishment of her neighbour, M. Ducoudray, who refused to admit the possibility of a duel in the night, and her own suspicions and those of Krauss.

"Is that all?" asked the commissary who was quite unmoved.

"All, sir."

Thereupon he took the floor, and, in a didactic tone he pointed out to her the frequent injustice of such suspicions. He was, he said, far from agreeing with M. Ducoudray, who was hardly the man to judge of such matters. He had known in his own experience, no less than ten duels in the night. Such occurrences might be rare among the middle classes, but among military men they were by no means uncommon. Hot-blooded men are not apt, when they wear swords, to think much of the time or place at which they use them. He was long in expressing this opinion, for he carefully rounded his periods and weighed his words, and frequently looked at the medical man for his approbation.

Madame Delorge felt her blood boiling in her veins. "In short, sir—" she began.

But he imposed silence upon her with a majestic gesture, and went on in an unchanged voice: "I have now made my notes, and I wish to see the defunct."

The courageous woman rose to accompany the commissary, and, without heeding his advice to remain where she was, she, herself, opened the door leading into the next room. Everything was already changed there, thanks to Krauss. On the bed now drawn out of the alcove, lay the body of the general, covered with a sheet, which fell in stiff folds to the floor. At the head of the bed, on a table having a white cloth, stood a crucifix between two lighted candles, while a branch of palm was dipped in a bowl of holy water. Two priests were kneeling in front of the crucifix and reciting the prayers for the dead.

The doctor turned down the sheet and examined the body, now undressed and cleansed of all stains of blood, and in medical terms he proceeded to state

the position and dimensions of the fatal wound. He said that the body showed no other indications of recent violence, but he described several old scars, particularly one on the right arm, and concluded his examination by expressing the opinion that there was nothing to preclude the idea of an honourable duel. If the death were the result of a crime, the crime had been committed by some one standing very close to the general, some one in whom he placed every confidence, and in that case there had been no contest of any kind.

"But," cried honest Krauss, "the crime is shown by the fact that my master is wounded in the right side. You can see for yourself that it was impossible for him to hold a sword in his right hand."

The doctor shook his head. "You are wandering from my department," he said. "I can only state what I see. I have already noted that the defunct has a large scar on his right arm. But I cannot now tell what difficulty, whether great or small, he had in using that arm."

Then came the examination of the general's sword. It was new, as Krauss had said, and the commissary admitted that it had never been used. "But the general may have employed another sword," he added. "I know several instances."

Here Madame Delorge interposed. "Let us admit, for a moment, the supposition that my husband fought a duel—that he used another sword than his own—why, then, in that case is his own out of the scabbard?"

But the commissary was by no means pleased by this acuteness, and he coolly answered: "Justice never sleeps; and if a crime has been committed, madame, it will certainly be punished." He thereupon put the general's sword back into the scabbard and sealed it, lighting his wax at one of the candles which burned at the head of the corpse, and saying as he did so that it would be unnecessary to examine it again.

The doctor had by this time finished his dreary task, and had spread the sheet over the general's body again. The two men then rapidly completed the remaining formalities of the law, and, bowing low, they retired with slow and solemn steps.

A thousand lamentable details then claimed Madame Delorge's attention; it is only in romances that great griefs are never intruded upon by vulgar cares and the odious requirements of civilization. Alone, without any relatives, without friends to spare her this additional trial, the unhappy widow was compelled to occupy herself with all the dismal details of the funeral; and there were letters also to be written. In addition to this, the shock to Raymond's nerves proved so great that he was suddenly taken alarmingly ill. All this confusion and activity prevented Madame Delorge from noticing the fact that M. Ducoudray had not returned, although he had started off at ten o'clock in the morning, and it was now four in the afternoon. It was quite dark before he arrived, and in what a state he was! Pale, exhausted, and covered with mud.

"Good heavens!" cried Madame Delorge, "what has happened to you?"

The worthy man smiled faintly. "Nothing, madame, except that I could find neither cab nor omnibus. I got caught in a shower, and was compelled to walk back through the mud. But that's nothing. I have fulfilled my mission, and will tell you the whole story."

He thereupon settled himself in his chair with the air of a man whose narrative was likely to prove a lengthy one. "On leaving here," he said, "I went at once to Dr. Buiron's, but he was out; his servant told me he would return, however, at one o'clock, as that was his consultation hour. As I had

two hours before me, I then went to breakfast, but I returned at one, and found the doctor, who seems to me a very honest man. As soon as he knew that I came from you, he said, 'I counted on being asked to give an account of the occurrences of last night, and so I wrote them down before I slept.' This paper, madame, he confided to me, and I will, with your permission, now proceed to read it."

M. Ducoudray thereupon wiped his spectacles, drew a paper from his pocket, unfolded it, and began to read as follows:—"An account of what happened to me on the night from November 30th to December 1st, 1851. It was about two o'clock, and I was asleep, when my door-bell rang violently. My servant almost immediately entered my room with a young cavalry officer, who, in a state of great agitation, said to me: 'Doctor, a great misfortune has just occurred; one of our generals is mortally wounded. Come with me quickly.' I dressed as rapidly as possible, and followed this officer. He led me to the Elysée—to the palace of the prince-president. But we did not go in by the main gate. He opened a side entrance, crossed a court-yard, and finally introduced me into a large gallery situated on the ground floor, and lighted by a lantern, which seemed to have been brought from a neighbouring stable. We there found three men wearing evening dress. They were talking with great earnestness, and evidently belonged to the highest class of society. They uttered an exclamation of satisfaction when I appeared, and hastily led me to a corner, where, under a cloak, there lay a man in a general's uniform—they called him General Delorge. I instantly saw that he must have been dead for at least a couple of hours. However, I made an examination, and discovered a sword wound in the right side, which must have been almost immediately fatal. I asked what had happened, and was told that General Delorge and one of his colleagues had, after a violent altercation, gone out into the garden and fought by the light of a lantern held by a stable-boy. No reply was made to various questions I addressed to the party, but I was asked to accompany one of these gentlemen to the late General's house and deliver the body to his widow. This I could not refuse to do. A cab was sent for, in which the corpse was placed, and I got in with a gentleman, whose name is unknown to me. He did not speak one word on our way to Passy, and when we left the house after fulfilling our mission he merely said: 'Take the cab—I have business in this neighbourhood.' He then handed me two hundred francs in two notes. On my return to my room I wrote down these facts, which I swear to be precisely accurate."

Whiter than snow—with dilated eyes and her hands clutching hold of the arms of her chair—Madame Delorge leaned forward, listening to each word, which confirmed all her suspicions. Why this mystery unless there were some crime to hide? Why was this body concealed in this lower room—why this conference between these men—this tardy summoning of a physician—the going and coming through these private doors, and this obstinate refusal to reply to all questions? Thus pondering, the poor woman, when M. Ducoudray ceased to read, murmured half to herself: "We must have proofs! And how shall we procure them?" The worthy man slowly took a pinch of snuff, and then rejoined: "These are the facts, and this is all I could hear from the doctor. However, I then determined to go to the Elysée."

Madame Delorge started. "Oh! monsieur," she exclaimed, "how can I ever thank you—"

He interrupted her with a deprecatory gesture. "When I take an idea into my head," he said, "I am apt to carry it out without much delay, and

three minutes later I was at the president's palace. I had decided to address myself to the commandant—a tall, handsome man, who at first looked at me with rather a suspicious air. No, he knew nothing of what had taken place the night before at the Elysée; he was relieved at midnight, and the officer on duty had said nothing of any extraordinary event. And as I continued to talk, he begged me politely, but firmly, to leave the guard-room, and allow him to attend to his duties. That was not very encouraging. But I would not own myself beaten. I determined to try and enter the palace. I went to the main entrance and said as I entered, 'Upholsterer?' But a doorkeeper caught me by the arm and wheeled me round—'Upholsterers,' said he, 'do not come in at this gate.'

M. Ducoudray might have made his tale less lengthy, but it would have been cruel to interrupt him. "Thus defeated," said he, "I tried another device. I stood outside near the gate, determined to accost all the officers who came out. Ah, madame, the military men of my youth were more polite than those of to-day! Every one to whom I spoke glared at me disdainfully, and said: 'What are you talking about? Duel! I know nothing of any duel!'"

To Madame Delorge this was only another proof of the mystery in which the crime was enshrouded. She knew that her husband was so much liked and respected that the news of his death would surely have created a great sensation among his brother officers.

"I began to feel somewhat discouraged," continued M. Ducoudray, "when I noticed a man of forty, or thereabouts, wearing civilian dress. However, his moustache and his general demeanour indicated that he was an officer. I went up to him, and without the least preamble I said, 'Sir, I am the nearest relative of General Delorge.' By the start he gave I saw that he knew more than the others, but he nevertheless answered me in precisely the same way. 'Sir,' said I, 'he was brought home dead this morning at daybreak; the persons who brought him said he was killed in a duel, but they did not give either the name of his adversary or those of his seconds. We are resolved to know them. I spoke very loudly, and made a great many gesticulations. The passers-by stopped to know what was going on; and my man did not like this. 'For Heaven's sake,' he said, 'don't talk so loud. I know something about the affair, and after all I see no harm in telling you what I know. Last evening, Madame Salvage, the former friend of Queen Hortense, and who, as you are no doubt aware, does the honours of the palace, held a small reception there. I was among the guests. About midnight I was talking with some friends in the vestibule when I heard voices raised in dispute on the stairs. Two men who were in a towering rage, and one whom I recognised as General Delorge, were coming down. The other one said to him: 'We have our swords, sir, and there is the garden; a groom from the stables will hold a lantern.' Thereupon they went out, and this morning I learned that poor Delorge had been killed.'"

Madame Delorge rose to her feet. "And the other man!" she cried, "what was his name?"

"Alas!" answered M. Ducoudray, "the person I spoke to would not, or could not tell it me. I endeavoured to obtain it by threats. I told him that a duel without seconds is an assassination, to which he rejoined that there was a witness if there were no seconds; and when I asked what witness he meant, he replied: 'The groom who held the lantern.' Now, Madame, it is this groom that we must find, for he must know the truth!"

Overwhelmed by a conviction of her own helplessness, Madame Delorge could not speak. What could she do? She was a widow, friendless, without influence or support, and her plans had already been disapproved of by the Commissary of Police, who had talked to her of the wickedness of suspicions.

"In your place, madame," said Ducoudray, "I should appeal to some of the general's friends. Some of them would, no doubt, take up the investigation. If I knew who they were —"

"Wait a moment!" said Madame Delorge, as she hastened from the room, soon reappearing with a little book in which her husband had noted down addresses. She hastily turned over the leaves and read name after name, at hap-hazard: "Comte de Commarin, Rue de l'Université; The Duc de Champdoce, Rue de Varennes; General Changarnier, Rue du Faubourg-Saint Honoré; General Lamoricière, Rue Las Cases; General Bedeau, Rue de l'Université."

"That's enough," interrupted Ducoudray. "If one of the generals you have named would take your cause in hand, why if a crime has been committed, as I believe, General Delorge will be avenged."

She was silent for a moment, and then, in a low firm voice, replied; "I will act to-morrow."

VI.

It was the second of December, 1851, a Tuesday. After a night of sleepless sorrow passed beside the lifeless body of the only man she had ever loved, Madame Delorge sent for a cab and drove away from her home. She had often heard her husband speak of General Bedeau as one of the bravest and most loyal men in the army. She had often seen him, and often received him at her table while they were residing in Algeria. It was to him, therefore, that she thought of first applying, and on her way to his residence she asked herself what she should say to arouse his sympathy effectually. But a sudden shock interrupted the course of her reflections. Her cab had been stopped near the Pont d'Iéna, and in some surprise she looked out to ascertain the cause, and also the meaning of the noise she heard. It was a detachment of artillery, three or four batteries, passing at full speed across the bridge, and turning abruptly to the right along the Quai de Billy. Madame Delorge could distinguish the cannons and caissons and the soldiers in their long blue overcoats, while the officers, sabres in hand, galloped up and down the column, shouting their commands in voices which rose above the rattle of the wheels. As soon as this body had swept by, the cab went on again, but not very far, for midway down the Quai de la Conférence it stopped afresh, and Madame Delorge heard her driver bandying words with some one she could not see. She lowered the glass in front. "What is the matter?" she asked.

"It seems," said the man, sulkily, "that vehicles are not allowed to pass. Look, madame!"

She looked—and saw that the whole length of the Champs Elysées—as far as the Place de la Concorde—was filled with cavalry drawn up arranged in line.

"They say," grumbled the coachman, "that we must cross the Seine by the Pont d'Iéna. It's abominable, I think!" and as he turned his horse's head he said, with an oath, "The devil take all reviews!"

Madame Delorge also supposed that a review was going on, and was

troubled lest she might, consequently fail to find General Bedeau at home. All the troops in Paris seemed to have turned out of their quarters. Regiments were spread out along the left bank of the Seine, while others were massed on the Esplanade des Invalides and around the Palace of the Corps Législatif. Here the cab could move no further, and Madame Delorge determined to proceed the rest of the way on foot. But the further she went the more astonished she became at the immense number of men under arms. The whole neighbourhood, moreover, had a strange look. An unusual number of police were moving about, and groups clustered at every corner reading placards affixed to the walls. Madame Delorge knew nothing of the intrigues and the political passions of this troubled epoch, and she was at a loss to understand this excitement. After all, what did it matter to her? Grief is selfish, and she saw no connection between this agitation and her husband's death.

Absorbed in her own thoughts she hurried on, but at the corner of the Rue de Bellechasse and the Rue de l'Université she could go no further, for a compact crowd had assembled there. A man was talking with angry vehemence in the centre of the throng, and she instinctively stopped to hear what he said. "It is an unheard-of crime! a most monstrous thing to arrest a man like that!" On hearing this, Madame Delorge turned to an old man at her side who seemed to be as angry as the others. "Who is it," she asked, "that has been arrested?"

"Bedeau, madame, General Bedeau."

She nearly fainted at the news, and then with the idea that the man was playing a joke upon her, she said: "Impossible! you are not in earnest?"

"I am, indeed," he answered. "Bedeau was arrested this morning as if he had been a vile criminal—dragged out of bed by six agents of the police, and carried off to prison. He struggled bravely, and called from the window of the cab: 'Treason! Treason! I am General Bedeau. Help, citizens! It is the Vice-President of the National Assembly who is being carried away!'"

"Yes," interposed another man, "that is exactly what he said."

At this moment a body of police arrived to clear the street, and in the twinkling of an eye the crowd scattered in every direction, while Madame Delorge took refuge under a door-way. The poor woman decided to go and see General Lamoricière, since to reach Bedeau was impossible. Accordingly she turned back, and at last entered the Rue de Las-Cases, where all was calm, silent, and deserted. There was not a human being to be seen from one end of the street to the other. The door of number 11 stood open, and Madame Delorge entered. At the foot of the stairs stood an old woman, who was evidently the concierge, talking with two young men, lodgers in the house. Madame Delorge went toward them, and, with a tinge of anxiety in her voice, asked: "Where shall I find General Lamoricière?"

The group started back and examined her with distrust. But at last the concierge answered: "He is arrested."

Madame Delorge caught at the wall for support. "He, too!" she cried.

"Yes, madame—this morning at daybreak. He called for aid, and they told him they would put a gag in his mouth if he did not hold his tongue." The woman's eyes blazed as she continued: "When the police came they told my husband to take them to the general's rooms, and he wouldn't do so. He shouted as loud as he could, 'Robbers! Help!' And then do you know what happened?" As she spoke she threw open the door of her room

and showed a poor fellow groaning on the bed. "That's the state the wretches left him in," she cried. "There were ten of them, and then they wanted to kill him, and, in fact, one of them cut him with his sword. But if there's justice left in France to-day we'll have it."

Seeing the ungovernable emotion of Madame Delorge, the two young men thought she must be a relative of the illustrious general, and so they courteously said, "Don't be troubled, madame, there's no danger—no one will dare touch a hair of his head. Besides, he is not the only one who is arrested—Cavaignac, Changarnier, Charras, and Thiers himself, are probably all at Mazas by this time!"

Without waiting to hear another word, Madame Delorge turned and fled. All her hopes were crushed. To whom could she turn now? Who would aid her now that all those on whom she relied were in prison? However, she hurried on towards the Palace of the Corps Législatif. Troops were drawn up all round the square, and under the portico she saw a confused mass of soldiers and citizens. Near her a voice called out: "The representatives, too!"

"The representatives first!" replied another voice. So then, the representatives of the people were to be driven from the palace by the soldiery! However, some of them resisted, whereupon they were pushed and buffeted, while two or three who attempted to address the crowd were hustled down a side street. Madame Delorge was nearly taken off her feet in the midst of the crowd, when suddenly a man, whom she recognized as a representative she had often seen with her husband, came towards her. In a hoarse voice he abruptly said to her, "You are Madame Delorge, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, madame, you see what is going on. The President of the Republic strangles the Republic which he had sworn to defend and protect. He dissolves the Assembly at the point of the bayonet. And he has found generals in the French army willing to aid him in this dastardly betrayal of his trust. But General Delorge, madame, is the soul of honour and loyalty. Does he know what is going on? Go to him, I implore you, and beg him to hasten here."

"General Delorge is dead," replied the widow in a choked voice.

"Dead!" repeated the deputy, like an echo; and then, transported with rage, he cried: "But we will avenge him, madame; we will avenge him! He could not be bought it seems. This *coup d'état* cannot succeed!"

Madame Delorge felt that she had at last met one of those courageous men who are revolted by crime, and are ready to devote themselves to the just cause of the feeble and the oppressed. But at this moment she saw him surrounded by a gesticulating crowd. She wished to speak to him again, but it was impossible. The surging crowd carried her further and further away. Young men were shouting at her side: "The Constitution is violated! Louis Bonaparte is beyond the pale of the law!"

By this time Madame Delorge began to have a dim perception of the motives which had prompted her husband's murder. This plot, which had slowly matured in darkness, needed many accomplices. One word from any of the generals might have defeated it, and this word her husband might have uttered. Perhaps he had discovered the secret, or it might have been heedlessly confided to him by one of those concerned. At last, then, Madame Delorge realized how closely her destiny was associated with that of the *coup d'état*. If it failed she would not lack assistance in her work of vengeance; but if it succeeded, she would never be listened to.

Suddenly a sharp pang came to her heart. The general's funeral was to take place at three o'clock; it was now twelve, and she was at an appalling distance from home. She forgot her fatigue, and hastened back to the spot she had left her cab; but it was no longer there—the driver had been obliged to retreat before the advancing troops, and it was only after a long search that she at last found it on the Quai d'Orsay. "Home!" she said, as she sunk into her seat; "and drive with the greatest possible speed."

This was a simple order to give, but one that proved impossible to execute on account of the incessant movements of the troops. The driver whipped up his horse, but was obliged to stop just as he entered the Champs Elysées. The President of the Republic, Prince Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, was advancing on horseback down the avenue, accompanied by a numerous escort, among which she recognized the Comte de Combelaïne. Then a sudden inspiration flashed through her mind, and extending her arms, "It is he!" she cried; "it is he!"

But the cry was unheard in the noise, except by De Combelaïne, who glanced into the cab. His eyes met the widow's, and in them her fancy read a gleam of the ironical triumph which is born of impunity. And why not? If the result of the *coup d'état* yet seemed doubtful near the Palais Bourbon, all foretold a victory here near the Elysées. The prince, surrounded by his gorgeous escort—all gold and feathers—was smiling and bowing to the right and to the left, while above the sound of trumpet and bugle there rose from among the intoxicated troops not only shouts of "Long live the President!" but the more significant one of "Long live the Emperor!" In the crowd on the pavement Madame Delorge detected consternation and stupefaction, but threats and imprecations were rare. Only one or two sceptics hazarded allusions to Louis Napoléon's previous ventures at Boulogne and Strasburg. "It is all over!" murmured the poor woman. "All over!"

The triumphal cortege passed on. The driver was then able to move again, and twenty minutes later the vehicle drew up before the door of the villa at Passy, where faithful Krauss awaited his mistress. "Ah! madame," he cried, "we have been so anxious ever since you left. M. Ducoudray was just going to look for you; we did not know what to do."

It was two o'clock, and the undertakers were already there. The door of the house was hung with black. "Where is—my husband?" asked the poor woman.

Krauss trembled apprehensively. "Alas!" he said, "the coffin was brought some time ago, and I laid my general in it."

"You did right," she answered, as with automatic steps, and with fixed, tearless eyes, she slowly ascended the stairs.

The coffin stood on three trestles, covered with a black pall, in the middle of the bedroom. On the pall lay a large white cross, and near by knelt two priests and M. Ducoudray. "Let every one leave the room," said the widow, in a tone which admitted of no questions, "and send my son to me."

She was obeyed, and for a moment she stood alone before the coffin which contained not only all that was mortal of her husband, but also her very happiness, her hopes, her youth. She shivered at the thought that any other hands than hers had laid the lawn over the face which would soon crumble into dust, and she was about to give orders to have the lid of the coffin removed again when she felt her dress pulled from behind. It was her son who sobbed: "Mamma, it is I; you sent for me. Oh! do speak to me!"

She took his hand, and holding it in hers, laid it on the coffin, "I sent for you, my son," she said, "in hopes that the recollection of this frightful moment may never leave your mind. You were a child yesterday, but this terrible misfortune makes you a man. You have a sacred duty to fulfil."

The little fellow looked at her earnestly.

"You have been told," she continued—"I told you myself—that your father was killed in a duel. That is not true. Your father—a brave and gallant soldier—was assassinated, and I know his murderer! Yes, I am ready to swear that I know him." She gasped for breath, and then went on more slowly, emphasising each word, "Everything will be done, my boy, to conceal the truth; and maybe all our efforts will prove useless. Maybe the assassin will appear far beyond and above our reach. That does not matter, Raymond, your father shall be avenged. To this work I shall consecrate my life—you must do the same. Swear to me, my son, that you will devote all your energy, all your intelligence, and all your strength to this sacred cause."

With a solemn gesture Raymond raised his hand, and answered "I swear!"

Before Madame Delorge could add another word heavy steps were heard outside, and some undertakers' assistants appeared at the door, remarking "The coffin looks as if it were pretty heavy."

They proceeded to raise the black drapery, and then the widow felt as if her heart were breaking and her reason deserting her. "No, you shall not take him away," she cried, clutching at the coffin. But it was the last effort she made—her arm fell beside her, and she sank, an inert mass, upon the floor.

VII.

It was midnight before Madame Delorge recovered the power of suffering. She was lying on her son's bed, and her maid was asleep in a chair hard by. The poor woman realised that she had only recovered consciousness to fall into that leaden slumber which follows a season of intense emotion. But a great peace rested upon her soul. Her grief was not less overwhelming, it was simply calmer. She now felt capable of facing her present situation and the duties which belonged to her future. Her maid awoke with a start, and, approaching the bed, asked her: "Are you better, madame?"

"Yes, much better—where are my children?"

"Both asleep, madame. But M. Ducoudray would not leave until you were better."

"Very well, then, give me my dressing gown—I will see him. I am not ill—and I must see M. Ducoudray."

That gentleman was eager to hear what Madame Delorge had done that morning. He had vaguely heard of the *coup d'état*, but he was unwilling to go into the city to obtain more information until he had seen her. He started up as the widow entered the drawing-room, and when his eyes rested upon her the words he would have spoken died away upon his lips. And no wonder; her hair had grown white—as is rarely the case in real life, though in romances it is of common occurrence—and twenty hours had done the melancholy work of twenty years. Elizabeth, the beautiful, happy wife, was no more; the cold and stately person he beheld was the Widow Delorge.

But she paid no attention to his amazement; indeed, it is doubtful if she perceived it. She at once proceeded to tell him the morning's story. He was utterly bewildered and enraged—all the more so, indeed, as he was a Liberal to the back-bone. He had always been opposed to the tyrant, Louis Philippe, and had even done much, in a quiet way, towards the fall of the oppressor—for which on bended knee, in the silence of his own room, he now, morning and night, implored the forgiveness of Almighty God. In short, he shared all the widow's suspicions. They both decided that the general must have been aware of Louis Napoléon's plot, that advances had been made to him, that he had rejected them and even threatened to expose the whole affair, and had thereupon been killed so that the secret of the conspiracy might not be revealed. But was the murderer M. de Combelaïne? This was a point that M. Ducoudray was not prepared to admit; for he remarked that a smile on a man's lips was no proof that he had committed a crime.

"But he did! I know he did," cried Madame Delorge. "That man has been our evil genius. All our misfortunes date from the day when he, with his two companions, arrived at Oran. They were then preparing this *coup d'état*. Now I know what they must have proposed to my husband when they were so ignominiously dismissed from our house. I have never since seen M. de Maumussy, but De Combelaïne has been here twice. I know I am right; this is one of those presentiments which never deceive."

"In all this public excitement," remarked M. Ducoudray, "my poor friend's death will pass almost unperceived. It is a hard thing to say, dear madame, but when Paris is calm again the general's death will have been forgotten. I doubt even if we shall obtain an inquest. And our witnesses, where are they?"

He was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Krauss, who was brandishing a paper. The good old fellow checked himself on seeing Madame Delorge, whom he supposed to be in bed, but after a moment's hesitation he began: "I am afraid that Marie, the cook, has made a great blunder. To-day, while the funeral was going on, a man came to speak to madame on important business; in connection, he said, with my poor master. Madame was asleep, and the cook was alone—for we had all gone to the cemetery—so she sent the man away again. He went off reluctantly she said; but before doing so he asked for a pencil and paper, and wrote this."

So saying Krauss handed the paper to his mistress, who after reading it at a glance, passed it on to Ducoudray. "You ask for witnesses," she said, quietly. "What do you think of that one?"

The writing on this paper ran as follows: "*Laurent Cornevin, groom at the Elysée stables, residing at Montmartre, Rue Mercadet, No. 16.*"

M. Ducoudray started up in excitement. "It is the very one!" he exclaimed—"the very groom who held the lantern. This man knows the truth. What a misfortune that I was not here when he came. And why was not this address given to us before?"

Krauss was in despair. "Because," he replied, "the woman—poor simpleton—attached no importance to it, and it was by the merest chance that she spoke of it to me."

Ducoudray had come to a grand decision. "Never mind!" he said,—"we can repair the mistake easily enough. I will see this man early to-morrow morning. The city may not be altogether quiet to-morrow, but as I am a Parisian by birth, a revolution does not alarm me."

Worthy M. Ducoudray's kind eagerness was due, in a great degree, to a motive which he discreetly kept in the background. He had indulged in con-

siderable reflection during the last twenty-four hours, and had asked himself why it would not be a good thing for himself and Madame Delorge to marry at some future period. He himself could see no obstacle to the plan. The lady was not yet forty, to be sure, while he was over sixty; but if she was still beautiful, he looked much younger than his years, and a difference of twenty summers between husband and wife is, after all, nothing very uncommon. Madame Delorge's despair did not discourage him either, for had he not been equally crushed when his wife died, and had he not eventually got over it? Of course it would be the same with her. Is there a sorrow in the world that resists the slow work of time and the dissolving action of weeks succeeding days, and years following months? No—none whatever. He therefore arranged a plan of action. To have risked a word to the widow would have been tantamount to closing her doors against him. But if he could only make himself necessary to her he considered that the ultimate success of his project would be certain. So he determined to adopt the rôle of a confidential friend until she some day realized that he was absolutely indispensable to her, and then he would suddenly unmask his batteries. He could not ask for a better occasion to serve her than this one, for Madame Delorge would refuse nothing to the man who aided her in her work of investigation. In addition, moreover, M. Ducoudray felt a certain satisfaction in being concerned in the affair, for the mystery interested him. It never entered his brain that he was incurring any risk by his interference, and he did not realize that this 2nd of December and the *coup d'état* might end most disastrously for himself as well as for hundreds of thousands of other people.

The chaotic mass of his new ideas agitated him to such a degree that he never closed his eyes that night. He rose at seven, dressed, and took a cup of coffee, and half an hour afterwards was out of doors. It was a dark and rainy morning. The shops in the streets of Passy were being slowly opened. Very few persons were to be met and these were mostly workmen, who talked in low voices with an uneasy air. It was not, however, until M. Ducoudray reached the Place de la Concorde that he realized the gravity of the events that had already taken place and those that were now proceeding. The first division of the Army of Paris, under the orders of General Carrelet, occupied the same position as on the day before in the Champs Elysées, in view of commanding the approaches to the Tuileries and the Elysée Palace. "Well, well!" ejaculated the astonished Ducoudray. "I never saw so many soldiers before!"

The painful shock he experienced was increased when he approached a group which had assembled in the Rue Castiglione, before a recently posted placard. A young man was relating what had occurred at the meeting held by the deputies at the townhall of the Tenth Arrondissement. "There were three hundred representatives present," he said, indignantly, "and they had voted for the removal of the president, and had appointed General Oudinot commander-in-chief, when an officer—a lieutenant—presented himself, and ordered them to disperse. They refused, declaring that they would only yield to force; whereupon the hall was invaded by soldiers, who arrested the representatives and carried them off to prison."

At this point the speaker was interrupted by a police agent who roughly ordered the group to disperse. "It is against the law," he said, "for crowds to collect at the street corners."

This language excited Ducoudray's wrath. "Why do they put up placards then," he asked, "if we are not to be allowed to stop and read them?"

"Move on, I tell you," rejoined the police agent; "if you don't I'll——" here he stopped, but he gave Ducoudray such a threatening look that our worthy friend fancied he could already hear the rattle of his jailer's keys.

He meekly obeyed the injunction to be gone, but as he did so he reflected that it might be as well to defer his visit to Montmartre. In that case, however, what would Madame Delorge think, and what would she say? So he went on again, and on reaching the boulevard he found that the excitement there was very great. But few of the shops were open, and written notices were affixed to the trees, calling on the people to arm themselves. But a police agent passing by saw them, and immediately tore them off. "This looks bad! I smell powder!" said Ducoudray, to himself, and in fact just as he reached the Rue Drouot several young men rushed past him, crying, "To arms! to arms! A representative has been killed in the Faubourg Saint Antoine! To arms!"

"They are right!" said Ducoudray, fiercely, to a man beside him.

The man in question started, but he made no reply, in fact he walked on all the faster. A moment later up came a company of light infantry from the direction of the Madeleine, and our friend turned into the Rue Drouot. Fear imparted the fleetness of youth to his aged limbs, and it was with arrow-like speed that he climbed the Rue des Martyrs. The further he got from the boulevards the quieter the city became. Shopkeepers stood as usual at their doors, and laughed together, shrugging their shoulders with a satirical air. Ducoudray thought, however, that he should find Montmartre in a state of disturbance. Not at all. Never had this unusually excited district looked calmer. At last Ducoudray reached the Rue Mercadet, and repaired to the house indicated on the paper given to the cook.

It was a huge building, five storeys high; and judging from the closely set windows it was divided into innumerable rooms. A long, narrow passage, very dirty and very dark, led to the porter's abode, a little hole under the stairs. Here sat an old woman of whom our friend inquired: "Laurent Cornevin, if you please?"

"He is not at home, but his wife is," said the woman.

"He is married, then?"

"To be sure he is, and has five children!"

With the idea that he should learn from the wife where her husband was, Ducoudray asked what floor the Cornevin's lived on. "The first," chuckled the old woman—"the first coming down from the sky, you understand."

Thus informed, M. Ducoudray climbed the stairs, and at the very top of them he met a woman who proved to be Madame Cornevin herself. She was tall, well built, young, and if not handsome, at all events very pleasant looking, with a frank, honest face. She was poorly but very cleanly dressed, and carried a bright healthy child, six or eight months old, in her arms.

"Come this way, sir," she said, showing her guest into a room shining with cleanliness, and then he perceived that her eyes were swollen with tears.

"Madame," he began, "I wish to see your husband on most important business. Where shall I find him?"

"Alas! sir, I don't know myself."

M. Ducoudray started. "What on earth do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I say, sir," and the woman's eyes filled as she continued: "He did not come home last night, but I was not anxious, for though it was his off-night, I thought he had taken some comrade's duty. Still, when it

was light I thought I would run to the Elysée and find out, but his companions declared that they had not seen him for three days! I can't understand it; for he's a man who loves his home and children, and has no bad habits. I fear, sir, that something must have happened to him."

Worthy M. Ducoudray had grown very pale, for the disappearance of the one solitary witness of General Delorge's death struck him as much more than a coincidence. He concealed his emotion, however, as best he could.

"Come, come, my good woman," he said, "you must not be so unhappy. Your husband will come back again. He has been detained by some comrade."

"Impossible, sir, for they are all at the Elysée, and they none of them know where he is."

Ducoudray felt a cold chill pass down his spine. One crime had been committed—why not another to conceal the first? "When did you last see your husband?" he asked.

"Yesterday morning, when he went out, saying that he had an errand to do at Passy."

"And he did not say what this errand was?"

"No; he only mentioned that he had to call on the wife of a general on important business."

Two little boys rushed in at this moment, but shrank back on perceiving a stranger. Their mother seemed surprised to see them, and severely asked: "Why have you come home at this hour?"

"The master sent us. He said: 'Run home quick and stay indoors, for there's going to be a revolution.'"

Madame Cornevin turned pale. Although she had been to the Elysée that morning, she had evidently not heard of anything. "A revolution," she murmured, "and I don't know where Laurent is!"

"Is he interested in politics?"

"He! no, sir. He was never interested in anything but in working for the children and me."

Never had our good friend felt so uncomfortable. A thousand vague apprehensions assailed him. This house seemed to him bristling with dangers, and the very floor burned his feet. "I will not trouble you further," he said, "I will call again to-morrow, and then of course your husband will be here."

"And who shall I tell him called?"

M. Ducoudray shuddered at this natural question. No, he would not give his name; it would be the height of imprudence. So he opened his pocket-book, as if to find a card, and then carelessly said: "Never mind! Just say that Monsieur Krauss came to see him."

That was not especially heroic, but the old gentleman was all goose flesh at the thought of Cornevin's being suppressed simply because he possessed an inconvenient secret; and as he descended the stairs he recapitulated to himself the various means he knew of to get rid of a man, from hiring a well-paid assassin and his dagger to employing a cook, induced by golden promises to slip a little poison into some soup. Once out of the house, however, the fresh air and the movement of the streets had their natural effect, and Ducoudray smiled at his exaggerated fears. However, as he approached the boulevards he noticed that the excitement was on the increase—it was indeed much greater now than it had been earlier in the day. Constant shouts went up from the crowd. "The constitution has been violated—Louis Napoléon is beyond the law! To arms! to arms!" Then a man passed

by with a gun over his shoulder. "Come on, citizens!" he cried; "there is fighting in the Rue Rambuteau."

At these words Ducoudray pricked up his ears like an old war-horse at the sound of a trumpet. "This is getting hot!" he muttered. Meanwhile the crowd became more compact and more animated each moment. Speeches were delivered by eager orators, who stood on the chairs in front of the cafés. They read the decree pronounced by the Assembly of the Tenth Arrondissement against Louis Napoléon. Policemen with swords moved up and down among the crowd. Cavalry clattered along the boulevards; the crowd opened to let the horses pass, and then closed up again. Cries of "Vive la République!" arose in every direction. The general fever seized hold of M. Ducoudray—he recalled the glorious days of July—he forgot Passy, Madame Delorge, the general, and M. de Combelaine. "I must see the end of this!" he murmured, as he went into a café on the Boulevard des Italiens for breakfast.

Here he heard all sorts of reports—some true and some false, often very absurd ones—but all of them threatening resistance. It was said that the authors of the *coup d'état* were losing their heads—that M. de Maupas was trembling with fear at the prefecture of police—that General Magnan hesitated—that Lamoricière would not act—that four carriages stood in the court-yard of the Elysée, with horses harnessed, all ready to bear the president and his accomplices far away, and "with him all the treasure he had collected!" added the best informed. Like the true Parisian Ducoudray boasted of being, he imbibed all these reports with the most eager credulity, accepting as the truth whatever pleased him. He had begun to look upon the *coup d'état* as a failure when he left the restaurant, but he soon realized his mistake; for, during the short space of time he had spent at breakfast, the mobile physiognomy of the boulevard had changed. The crowd had become more compact, if possible, but it was ominously silent. Not a laugh was heard; and there were no more shouts of "Down with Soulouque!" which had previously caused the soldiers to open their eyes in astonishment. However, troops were still hurrying to and fro.

"Is there fighting going on anywhere?" asked Ducoudray.

"Yes; there are barricades in the Rue Transnonain, in the Rue Beaubourg, and the Rue Grenetat."

"And the police let them stand," said a man near by.

Suddenly came a shout—followed by profound stillness. "What is it?" asked Ducoudray of two young men who were hurrying past.

"Saint-Arnaud's proclamation."

"Where is it?"

"At the next street corner."

The worthy man hurried there, and amid the indignant remarks of a couple of hundred persons standing round about, he read: "Inhabitants of Paris: The Minister of War calls your attention to the following decree: Each individual caught erecting or defending a barricade, or with arms in his hand, will be shot down.

"LE ROY DE SAINT-ARNAUD,

"Minister of War."

This was brief, significant, and to the point; it embodied, moreover, the entire policy of the *coup d'état*. However, the proclamation seemed to kindle resistance rather than quell it. "They only want a pretext to fire on us," said a man with a white beard. And at this moment, as if to point his words, there came the noise of a violent fusillade in the direction of the

Quartier des Gravilliers. And presently, moreover, a young man dashed by, shouting as he went: "It is in the Rue Aumaire—I am going for a gun."

More than one had the same idea, for two steps further on M. Ducoudray saw a shop-keeper put up his shutters and write on them with chalk: "Arms given to any one applying."

As the night came on, however, the firing diminished. By dint of using his elbows freely, our friend had finally got as far as the Château d'Eau—when all at once a hoarse cry rose from a thousand throats, and he found himself swept along with the crowd. A woman who had lost her hat, and who had a little girl with her, clung desperately to his arm, and implored him to save her child. He tried to help her, but he was thrown against a tree. A whirlwind seemed to pass over him, he caught sight of the flash of a sword, and closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he was alone; the crowd had dispersed indeed, for several squadrons of lancers had charged, and men were now picking up the wounded.

"And what will to-morrow be?" groaned the old gentleman, who, knowing Paris so well, felt that bitter revenge would be wreaked for this rash act.

Never had a revolution seemed so imminent as on that evening, the 3rd of December, 1851. Despite the renewed protestations and prohibitions of the police, crowds gathered at every corner—blouses jostled coats, and hands hardened by toil grasped white ones daintily gloved. Barricades, moreover, were being rapidly erected in every direction. However, eager as our friend was to see more of the contest, he felt that it was now high time for him to return to Madame Delorge, and as a cab passed by he hailed it and got inside.

VIII.

WHEN M. Ducoudray reached the villa at Passy it was nearly nine o'clock in the evening, and he asked himself what on earth he was to say to the widow. "I have nothing to hide," he reflected, "and yet I certainly acted wisely in not leaving my name. She will not understand it, though, I'm sure." And he sighed despondently.

He expected to find Madame Delorge wild with suspense; but she quietly took her little girl from her lap as he entered the room, and calmly exclaimed: "Well, sir?" She was very pale, but her demeanour shewed that she was firmly determined to keep up her courage and fulfil her duties. Raymond was seated at the table learning his lessons, and as Madame Delorge repeated her query, M. Ducoudray looked meaningly at the boy, as if to say, "Shall I speak before him?"

"Most certainly. When he is older he will inherit my task if I have not accomplished it, and it is advisable that he should learn each event as it takes place."

Accordingly, the worthy man sat down and described all the occurrences he had witnessed, the attitude of the crowd, and the dangers he had escaped.

"And Cornevin," interrupted Madame Delorge—"the gooom at the Elysée stables—have you seen him?"

"No—only his wife," replied Ducoudray hesitatingly. He really did not dare to tell the whole truth to Madame Delorge, for fear of frightening her, but she insisted on his speaking, and when he had done so she exclaimed:

"Ah! indeed! I expected something like that."

Thereupon, the good man eagerly added that Cornevin would, of course, be back again in a day or two, but she rejoined: "Why do you try to encourage me with hopes which you do not feel yourself? This fellow was too important a witness not to be got rid of in some way or another. Besides, he was all the more dangerous as he was honest. He was watched, of course, and when he was seen coming here his fate was sealed. Circumstances were propitious for his disappearance. What is the fate of one man in such times as these?"

Ducoudray turned pale. "We ought to gather courage and hope, madame," he said, "for the *coup d'état* will not succeed."

"But it will, sir."

"Oh, excuse me; I have spent the whole day in the streets, and I understand the feelings of the people——"

"Nevertheless," interrupted Madame Delorge, "the *coup d'état* will succeed. I have learned a great deal since I saw you last night. I have been looking over my husband's papers. He long since foresaw what has now happened—and that is why he wished to resign before returning to Paris. An unfinished letter in his own handwriting convinces me of this, but, unfortunately, I cannot discover for whom it was intended. 'My friend,' he writes, 'be on your guard—all is ready for the grand *coup*. It may burst forth at any moment—to-night or to-morrow—perhaps at this very moment while I am writing these words. Don't lose a minute. The stupid dissensions among honest men insure success to the first knave who chooses to snatch at power.'"

"And you believe this? You believe that the general's enemies—his murderers—will soon occupy the highest places in the land?"

"I do."

"And yet, madame, you hold to your own plans of—vengeance?"

The poor woman started. "Why should you call justice vengeance?" she asked. "A murder has been committed—I only ask that the murderer may be detected and punished. Is that too much to ask?"

"Alas! madame," answered her worthy friend. "If the *coup d'état* really triumphs, M. de Combeilaine will be beyond your reach!"

"That may be so," replied Madame Delorge, "but some very insignificant cause often does the most mischief. The subsidence of a little sand will cause the most solid-looking edifice to fall to the ground. An express train travels swiftly, but a child may have placed a pebble on the track, and the powerful engine rolls to the bottom of an abyss. I may be this stone, sir—this grain of sand."

These words decided M. Ducoudray to beat a retreat as fast as possible—for he felt far from comfortable, and was no longer so determined to devote himself body and soul to the cause of the general's widow. "Dear me! How she talks!" he said to himself. "Heaven only knows what mad acts her hatred will impel her to commit. She is a very dangerous person to have anything to do with. If the *coup d'état* proves a fiasco, as I think it will—why, then I shall side with Madame Delorge against De Combeilaine. But if, on the contrary, it succeeds—well, I can only say that I am too old to sacrifice my peace of mind and body."

The next morning he rose at an early hour, but he still retained too vivid a remembrance of the charge of lancers to venture into the heart of Paris again without having ascertained what was going on there. Accordingly he went out to consult various tradespeople he knew in Passy, where, despite the distance from Paris there now prevailed considerable

excitement. There were rumours of the arrest of several more generals, and of risings at Rheims and Orleans. By ten o'clock Ducoudray could bear it no longer. Remembering that one of his friends resided on the Boulevard Montmartre, he started off, determined to ask his friend's permission to sit at one of his windows and watch the scene. "There, at least," thought he, "I shall be in safety."

The crowd on the Boulevards was as large, and even more hostile than on the day before. Orators were hoisted on to the shoulders of their companions, and held forth in violent language. On the walls there were new placards, which ran as follows :

"The erection of barricades in the public streets is strictly forbidden. People are warned not to assemble in crowds, which will be dispersed by force. Let peaceable citizens remain at home.

"Paris, December 4th, 1851.

"DE MAUPAS.

"Prefect of Police."

M. Ducoudray was momentarily tempted to follow the Prefect's advice and return to Passy, but the remarks he heard about him speedily changed his mind again. "They threaten well," said one young man, with a sneer, "Their bark is worse than their bite. They talk like this, but they will never dare to carry out their threats."

This was also Ducoudray's opinion, and he accordingly proceeded as far as the corner of the Rue des Capucines, where he saw a tall old man—said to be a representative who had escaped arrest—addressing the crowd, and explaining with considerable precision what form the resistance of the people ought to take.

"There are sixty thousand soldiers under arms to-day," said one man in the throng.

"Well fed and with plenty to drink," added another.

"Ay, they are all half drunk," remarked a third.

"Very well, then," said the orator, "let us be careful, and give them no reason for any violence."

The crowd seemed to be curious rather than angry, though when an officer galloped by there would occasionally be a shout of "Down with the traitors! No dictator!" On hearing this M. Ducoudray became triumphant. "Ah!" said he to a neighbour in crowd, "these *coup d'état* gentlemen may shake in their shoes!" and feeling quite reassured he went on towards the Rue de Richelieu.

All at once a loud clamour arose. An officer of the National Guard, galloping at full speed down the street, had turned his horse too short, and the animal reared and threw his rider. A crowd at once surrounded and threatened the dismounted horseman, but some young fellows interposed and hustled him through the throng into an adjoining house.

By this time Ducoudray had reached the abode of the person whom he meant to ask for a window. His friend gave him a cordial welcome, and asked him how things were going. "These *coup d'état* people would retreat if they could," rejoined Ducoudray, authoritatively; "but they can't—they've burned their ships. They really meditated a *coup de bourse* rather than a *coup d'état*. From Louis Napoléon, the president, down to Maumussy and Combelaïne, they are all of them impoverished men. What would become of them if they retreated now?"

At this moment the noise of a cannonade so violent and so close that the windows rattled, interrupted his remarks. Both men turned very pale. "Good heavens!" cried Ducoudray, "what is that?"

"Cannons," answered his friend, laconically; then, after a pause, he added: "I have been expecting it, for a very strong barricade has been erected on the boulevard nearly opposite the Gymnase theatre."

There now came another discharge, and they at once hastened to the window. Strangely enough, the crowd below seemed no more moved by these cannons than they might have been by the toy ones at Francoini's circus. No one was sufficiently curious to go and see what had happened. Women and children moved about as on the days of a great review. And yet the crowd constantly had to part to make room for passing litters conveying wounded men. Two o'clock was on the point of striking when from the direction of the Madelaine there came the roll of drums. "The troops! the troops!" cried the crowd. But no one seemed to be alarmed, and, in fact, far from dispersing, the people stationed themselves in rows along the sidewalks, as if a great procession were coming.

However, their sense of security did not last long. The troops, who were commanded by General Canrobert, marched on in a never ending file, and with each regiment came a battery of artillery. The soldiers, so Ducoudray thought, were unusually animated. There was a sparkle in their eyes and a restlessness about their movements as if they had been tiptling. Many of the officers, moreover, were smoking. All this time distant cannonading was heard, and the two men at the window could see the smoke from the battery at the top of the Boulevard Poissonnière. They leaned out to obtain yet a better view, when all at once from the head of the column there came a quick fusillade. The people fled in all directions, and still the firing continued. "It is only powder!" stammered M. Ducoudray. "It must be powder! They would never fire like that on an unarmed crowd, on women and children."

A bullet which whistled past him, and struck the wall two inches from his head, cut his words short. More dead than alive the two friends threw themselves flat on the floor. It was quite time they did so, for a hail-storm of bullets now crashed through the windows, riddling the curtains and smashing a mirror and a clock inside the room. Meanwhile above the noise rose the angry shouts of the soldiery: "Shut your windows! Close your houses!"

This lasted for ten minutes. Then came a long silence, followed by frightful shrieks and groans. Finally not a sound.

Some time elapsed before M. Ducoudray and his friend dared to crawl to the window and look out. There were only soldiers on the boulevard now. They were leaning on their smoking guns, some glaring angrily up at the windows, and others apparently stupefied by the scene. On the sidewalks, up and down, lay half a hundred bodies or so, including several women and two or three children. Near the corner of the Rue Montmartre something glittered. A poor little "coco" vendor, who had taken it into his head to offer his beverage to the troops, was lying there with his bright metal filter on his back, pierced with twenty balls. Suddenly a shop door was timidly opened, and some men came out cautiously, picked a poor fellow who was wounded off the pavement, and carried him into the shop. Meantime detachments of six or eight soldiers were going from house to house, and could be seen at the windows of each successive floor. "They are making domiciliary visits," whispered Ducoudray in his friend's ear. "They will come here, too."

And, indeed, in another moment they heard an imperative knock and then loud shouts of "Open at once, or we break down the door."

They hastily threw the door open. The soldiers came in and began to search the rooms, opening every wardrobe and closet, and probing the beds with their bayonets. One of them even took hold of Ducoudray's hands and smelt them, to make sure that he had not been using firearms.

"Oh! could you suppose it sir?" cried the worthy man.

"Could I suppose?" interrupted the angry soldier—"I suppose nothing—I only know that we were fired at from the windows, and those who fired must be found."

Ducoudray was about to speak, but the young lieutenant in command of the men made a sign to him to remain quiet. The officer seemed greatly disturbed. "It is a frightful catastrophe," he said to the two friends, while his soldiers continued their search of the house. "We did all that was in human power to avert this calamity; but our men were like mad. They would hear nothing we said—they even threatened us. Carried away by the recollection of the 'war of the windows' in those dark days of June, they thought themselves surrounded by invisible enemies. Every house seemed full of weapons. Besides, most of the men had been drinking, and at the first shot they went wild——" He said no more, being interrupted by a noise on the upper floor, on hearing which he hastened out of the room.

Ducoudray and his friend were now alone, and they looked at each other in silent consternation, for neither of them cared to speak. It was another tenant of the house, who aroused them. He was very pale, and carried his arm in a sling. Returning home from business just at the moment of the fray he had been wounded by a bullet. "And I was lucky in getting off so well," he said, "for two poor devils were killed at my side."

He then went on to describe what he had seen. He mentioned a bookseller who had opened the door of his shop to the frightened crowd, and who, as a reward, was shot dead in sight of his wife and children; and he related occurrences that had taken place along the line. Several of the cafés had been sacked, so to speak, and the refugees driven out of their shelter. At the Cercle du Commerce several members had been severely wounded, while opposite the Hôtel Sallandrouze he had seen an artillery officer throw himself in front of his guns, and call out to his men: "Now—fire. Thank God the first shot will kill me."

The new-comer also reported that there had been little or no resistance; for none of the barricades were held. When the moment came to defend them, those who had raised them disappeared as if by magic. The troops had only to appear to conquer. And besides, what were a thousand or twelve hundred persons against an entire army?

M. Ducoudray listened pale and trembling, and frequently wiped the cold sweat from his brow. "I must go home! I must go home!" he repeated again and again with idiotic reiteration, and finally about six o'clock he started off. "I was so utterly upset," he said later on in describing his emotions on this calamitous day—"I was really so afraid that I feared nothing." The troops were now bivouacking all along the boulevards. Fires had been lighted, and the flames threw strange, fantastic shadows on the house fronts. The soldiers were eating and drinking gaily, as after a great victory. Wine ran freely, and here and there the blue flame of a punch-bowl could be seen. With these exceptions the city was sad to a degree.

As Ducoudray walked through the deserted streets, he thought to himself: "Who will call, ask after or care a sou about the death of General Delorge, or the disappearance of poor Cornevin? What do two victims, more or less, matter in such times as these?" Still he thought it his

duty to call on Madame Delorge before he went home. He found her with her children, and looking so calm that he thought she knew nothing of the day's fatal events. "Poor, dear lady," he said, "your hopes are all crushed. The *coup d'état* is successful, and M. de Combelaine is now all powerful!"

IX.

MONSIEUR DUCOUDRAY was right this time. Never within the memory of man had Paris been so sorrowful as on the morning of the 5th of December. The boulevards were in possession of the troops—vehicles were not allowed to pass along them. From the Bastille to the Madeleine, all the shops were closed; and yet—so peculiarly are Parisians constituted—it was scarcely noon when crowds began to collect again. Groups gathered on the sidewalks about the piles of yellow sand covering the pools of blood of the night before. People stood also before the Hôtel Sallandrouze, the front of which was riddled with bullets. But it was before the Cité Bergère in the Rue du Faubourg-Montmartre, that the crowd was most dense. The iron gate was shut and locked, but through the bars some thirty-five or forty bodies could be seen. They were the poor creatures who had been killed the day before, and whose bodies had not been claimed or recognized. Among them were three women. "A most salutary sight!" muttered some apologist for the *coup d'état*, for such were beginning to appear, now that its success was no longer doubtful.

Yes, the French people were conquered, and they hastened to express their opinions through the *plebiscite*, which, when Louis Napoléon asked if he did not deserve a reward, answered by more than seven million ayes against seven hundred thousand naves. Now the quarry gathered round the game. M. de Maumussy was spoken of for a ministerial portfolio; M. de Combelaine, now more of a count than ever, was appointed to an important and lucrative position, and M. Coutanceau announced the establishment of a great financial enterprise supported by the Government.

No one followed all these events with more interest than M. Ducoudray. He, who usually held his head so high, now went about timidly with his eyes cast down, as if he was eager to escape observation. The secret he possessed in reference to the death of General Delorge weighed heavily on his soul. And when he saw any especially arbitrary or violent measure of the men in power succeed, the very marrow in his bones was chilled. "I trust in Heaven," he said "that they will forget me."

He would perhaps have been less uneasy had he been able to induce Madame Delorge to give up her plans of vengeance. But he failed in his attempts. "The triumph of the wicked will not last long," was her invariable reply. "An edifice, the first stone of which was sealed with blood, must crumble sooner or later."

Then her friend urged her at least to defer any steps until a more auspicious moment. "What would she gain," he asked, "by raising her voice now?" To these incessant remonstrances Madame Delorge finally made no reply. Only, at every meal, the general's place was laid precisely as if he were still living, for she had declared that it should be so until she had obtained justice. "That vacant chair," she said, "will remind us of our duty."

At last, M. Ducoudray began almost to detest her. "She is simply

crazy," he said. "Never in my life did I see such a headstrong creature."

Madame Delorge had penetration enough to see what was going on in the mind of her old neighbour. So she talked less to him of her designs, though she had in no degree relinquished them. She determined, as soon as Paris was calmed down, to make a formal complaint—with what result she could not tell. If an inquest were ordered she would at least learn the name of her husband's adversary, or, as she opined, his murderer. Still up to this time her instinctive belief in the complicity of the Count de Combelaine was supported by no material proof.

However, before she could file any formal complaint she must find the only witness of the general's death. When a fortnight had elapsed after M. Ducoudray's visit to Cornevin, and nothing had been heard from him, she determined to write to the man's wife, and beg her to call upon her. It was on a Saturday that the faithful Krauss carried this letter to Montmartre, and on the following afternoon the groom's wife presented herself at the villa. M. Ducoudray was there, as was his habit at this time of day. Not having been forewarned, he started and grew very red when Krauss entered the sitting-room and informed his mistress that Madame Cornevin wished to see her. Ah! if the good old gentleman could have only gone up through the ceiling or got out of the room unseen. But alas for him, there was no escape.

"Let her come in," answered Madame Delorge, eagerly.

The poor woman appeared with a child in her arms, and it was not necessary to ask if her husband had returned. M. Ducoudray would not have known her if she had not sent in her name, so greatly was she changed by three weeks' sorrow and suspense. She was but the shadow of the youthful, healthy looking woman he had seen in the Rue Mercadet—so proud of her children, and of her clean, orderly home.

Her thinness was appalling; her dark calico dress hung in loose folds over her bust and shoulders, while every drop of blood had left her face. She had wept so much that her eyelids were scarlet, and her tears had worn furrows along her cheeks. As for the child, however, he was as dimpled and as healthy as before. The poor woman's face brightened when she saw the old gentleman. "Ah! Monsieur Krauss," she cried, whereupon M. Ducoudray wished he could fade away.

"You are mistaken, dear madame, you are mistaken," he stammered.

Madame Cornevin looked very much amazed, and then, in a timid way, as if fearing she had made a blunder, she remarked: "Was it not the name of Krauss you gave me, sir? I wrote it down as soon as you had gone."

"That will do," interrupted Ducoudray, "that will do." And then with the sterile volubility of the people who attempted to explain an inexplicable thing, he undertook to justify what he called his little mistake.

But Madame Delorge did not care; she calmed him with a kind smile, and then took a chair nearer Madame Cornevin. "Can it be possible, my poor woman," she said, "that you have had no news from your husband yet?"

"None, madame."

"What have you done?"

"First, I went looking among the dead, and examined the bodies of all the men who were killed; and when, on the 6th of December, a neighbour told me that there were at least a hundred more bodies in the cemetery at Montmartre, I hastened there. It was true; they were laid out in a line, with all but their heads buried. Oh, it was awful to look at! One poor

lady found her husband, though, and nearly fainted. Thank Heaven, mine was not there."

Madame Delorge shuddered. "Then why do you feel sure that your husband is dead?" she asked.

"Because a police agent told me so. You see, madame, I said to myself, when I heard of the arrests that were made, that perhaps Laurent might be among them, and I thought that if he were sent to the colonies as a punishment that I might perhaps go too, and then we could be happy again. So I went off to an office where I inquired. They told me to come back in a week. I did so, and then they said that among the arrests there was no person answering to the name of Cornevin."

Madame Delorge remained silent for a moment; she was expressly struck by the woman's persistent conviction that her husband had been killed. "Why are you so sure," she asked at last, "that your husband was in the fight? You told this gentleman the day you first saw him that Cornevin cared nothing for politics."

"I did not know then as much as I know now. It seems that my husband had made some new acquaintances—bad fellows—and they led him astray. He was faithful to his duties and kind to me—but he belonged all the same to secret societies."

"Who told you so?"

"The head groom."

"Did you go to the Elysée, then?"

"Yes, madame, several times."

At this point Ducoudray leaned towards Madame Delorge; he was very uneasy, and he whispered to her that he thought she had better say no more. But she did not take the slightest notice of his intervention, for the decisive moment of the interview had come. "In your place, my poor woman," she continued, "I should have applied to one of his comrades rather than to the head groom."

"I did that afterwards, madame. I sent to his very best friend, a man named Grollet. He was as unhappy as I am, and as soon as he saw me he burst into tears."

"But what did he say?"

"He said that the head groom was quite right, that Laurent had been busy with matters he had better not have meddled with."

Madame Delorge and M. Ducoudray exchanged glances. "And what were these matters?"

"He didn't say."

"Did you hear anything of a duel?" asked Madame Delorge.

"Of a duel?"

"Yes, of a duel, which took place in the Garden of the Elysée, and in which a man was killed."

"No, indeed," was the reply, spoken in a tone of such sincerity that it was impossible to doubt the woman. She evidently knew nothing.

Nevertheless, Madame Delorge was not disposed to relinquish the matter. "Won't you try," she said gently, "and see if you can't remember what occurred the last time your husband was at home? Did he not leave in view of coming to Passy—to see the wife of a general, to see me? I feel certain that he must have told you something of that urgent business."

"No, madame, not a word."

"What! didn't he allude to a man that was killed in the Garden of the Elysée on the night of the 30th of November?"

Madame Cornevin started. "Who was killed?" she asked.

"My husband—General Delorge."

The good woman drew a long breath. She was evidently trying to collect her thoughts, and striving to find any possible connection between the general's death and Cornevin's disappearance. "Do you think, then, that my husband was present at that duel?" she finally asked.

"If there was a duel—which we are much inclined to doubt," said Ducoudray, forgetting his prudent resolutions. "The scene," he continued, "was lighted by a stable lantern which Cornevin held. He alone knows the truth—and if the general said a word when he stood there, your husband must have heard it!"

Madame Cornevin started to her feet with flashing eyes. "Ah! I understand!" she cried. "I see now why Laurent was so sad, and why he did not wish to stay at the stables. He knew everything, and they were afraid of his testimony." The woman's excitement increased as she spoke, and in a tone that Ducoudray never forgot as long as he lived, she added through her clenched teeth: "Let them take care!—those who have committed this crime. I care nothing for life compared to vengeance!"

Even Madame Delorge was dismayed at her vehemence. "Alas!" she said, "my sorrow is like your own——"

"No, madame," interrupted the woman. "If I were alone in the world you might say that—but I have children."

"And so have I—two."

"Yes—but they are your consolation, while mine are my despair, for it was Laurent's toil that put bread in their mouths. And now what is to become of us? Can I earn enough to feed six of us? Even if I were to work night and day it would be impossible. Must I go to the Relief Office and have my name entered? I should be admitted, I have no doubt. But long days of suspense would follow, and we should starve in the meantime. If the baker shakes his head and refuses me credit, what shall I say to the children when they cluster round me crying with hunger? Must I beg from door to door with my children clinging to my skirts? Must I steal?—I can't. I should not have the courage."

Big tears were falling from Madame Delorge's eyes. That same morning she had thought she was the most wretched woman in the world, and now she saw one who was even more unhappy than herself. She took both of Madame Cornevin's hands in hers. "Be calm," she said, "as long as I live you shall want for nothing!"

The woman smiled sadly. She plainly fancied that these words were but the promises born of passing compassion, and destined to be forgotten on the morrow. Madame Delorge detected this, and so in a solemn tone she added: "I swear to you that I mean what I say—that I shall always, as you may need assistance, be ready to render it. I shall never forget that if your husband has disappeared it was probably because he wished to bring me the last words spoken by mine. And I will do more; if you will intrust your dear sons to me they shall be brought up with my own, and as my own."

Again did worthy M. Ducoudray allow himself to be carried away. "Rely on me, too, my poor woman!"

Madame Cornevin doubted no longer, but falling on her knees before the widow, and kissing her hands she stammered: "Thank you—oh, thank you for my children's sake! You have saved their lives. We can never sufficiently evince our gratitude for such goodness!"

"Who can tell?" said Madame Delorge; and then she added; "The time may come when we shall be able to avenge our husbands."

"On that day," cried Madame Cornevin, "rely on me. Tell me what I am to do, and no matter what it may be I will do it. And the children will not hesitate to give their lives if need be. They shall be told each day how they lost their father, and that it is their duty to see that justice is done!"

The two women stood facing each other, holding each other's hands. The general's widow and the groom's widow were bound together by a solemn compact of hatred. M. Ducoudray felt a cold chill creep up his back, and he was very sorry he had spoken, "for they are both mad," he thought—"quite as mad as March hares." And when Madame Cornevin had departed—carrying with her the first instalment of an annuity of twelve hundred francs—the good man undertook to prove to Madame Delorge the utter folly of mixing herself up with the affairs of the groom's wife. She did not argue the point—she listened in silence—but very early the next morning she went out to the Rue des Saussayes to call on Dr. Buiron. He was at home, and recognised her as soon as she entered. He hastened to offer her a chair, thus concealing his own embarrassment and arranging his replies, possibly, to the questions he foresaw.

But she cut his attentions short. "I intend, sir," she said, "to file my complaint at once and apply for an inquest. My husband, you know, has been assassinated."

He started back and immediately exclaimed: "I, Madame—I know nothing of the kind!"

The widow was not surprised. The astonishing cordiality of her welcome had prepared her for this answer. "And yet, sir, the very care you took in writing your account of the event proves that it struck you as being very strange."

Madame Delorge was pale and cold, while the physician was flushed and animated. "I do not know, madame," he said, "that you have the right to refer to a paper which I intrusted to the discretion of Monsieur Ducoudray. What does it matter, however, and what does it prove? Simply that I was deeply impressed by the events of a night so sad for you. Since then I have reflected, and I recognise the blunder I made, for really—"

He stammered and grew confused, and seemed to wither into nothingness under the widow's contemptuous glance. "Would you speak thus," she asked, "if the *coup d'état* had not succeeded?"

"Madame!" he cried, indignantly; and then, with sudden decision, as if, so to speak, he were bent on jumping straight into the mud, he proceeded with considerable vehemence: "You are right; events have unquestionably affected my judgment. The affair is political in all its bearings. Is it wise for me to meddle in it? I am young, and just starting in my profession. I have no experience, and I have a mother to support. Why should I make enemies for myself?"

Madame Delorge rose from her own chair. "That is all you have to say, I presume?"

"Yes, madame, all."

"Farewell! I shall utter no reproaches; your own conscience will do that." And with these words she left the room.

"Poor miserable coward," she murmured on her way out. "Is he afraid? Has he been bought by my husband's murderer?"

She was not discouraged, however, but drove at once to the Rue Jacob, where resided a lawyer, M. Roberjot by name, who had formerly been

employed by her husband. Young—not yet thirty—of an excellent social position—and possessed of considerable property, M. Roberjot was one of those lawyers whose destiny seems clearly indicated early in life. However, he had drawn himself into his shell, and remained there since the second of December, waiting until he was quite certain whether he had better attach himself to the new government or attach himself to the opposition.

He was utterly amazed when he saw Madame Delorge enter his office, and while he handed her a chair he closely scrutinized her countenance. It was with the utmost attention he listened to her, and when she had ceased speaking, he exclaimed: "Madame, I am inclined to believe that your conjectures are only too near the truth. What you say throws new light on this great mystery."

"Do you mean that you have already heard it spoken of?" she eagerly asked.

He at once answered, "Yes."

"Who is talking of it?" she inquired.

"Not the public, madame, for it is stunned by the rapid succession of events—but the people among whom I live, and who are acquainted always with what goes on in Paris. However, I hardly know if I ought to repeat to you what they say."

"Go on, sir."

He hesitated. "First, madame, let me say that I look on all the various reports respecting your husband as absolutely false. It is said that he committed suicide."

"My husband! And why in the name of Heaven?"

"It is asserted that he had made most compromising engagements with both sides—that he had written several letters—most imprudent ones—that, in short, he was playing a double game, and that, threatened with exposure, he lost his head, and ran his sword through his body."

Madame Delorge rose from her chair. "It is an infamous calumny!" she cried. "What scoundrel invented and circulated such an infamous tale?"

"Ah! madame, does any one ever know the authors of the thousand calumnies which circulate through Paris?"

"Go on, sir; what else have you heard?"

"That General Delorge fell in a duel, arising from some dispute about money; a large sum, it is said, had secretly disappeared from the prince-president's private room."

Tears of mingled anger and grief sprang to the poor widow's eyes. "Enough, sir, enough! I can bear no more. Whence come these tales? You do not know, but I do. It was not enough, it seems, to assassinate my husband; they wish to dishonour his memory. But that shall not be—I will appeal to the Press."

M. Roberjot shook his head: "Alas! madame, I doubt if you would find a paper willing to publish a line on your behalf."

Finally, however, at her entreaties, he consented to take her to the office of an influential paper, the editor of which professed to feel an implacable hatred against the government. He listened to Madame Delorge's story with appalling imprecations, but when she had finished he told her that the Press was reduced to absolute silence, and that an allusion to this affair would close their offices. He wished he could help her, but he could not face utter ruin. "And these are the men of to-day!" sighed Madame Delorge as she returned to Passy. But all the same, she duly filed her complaint on the morrow.

X.

WHEN a complaint is filed in proper form it is quite impossible that no notice can be taken of it. Now, Madame Delorge had complied with all the requirements of the law as duly advised by M. Roberjot, who had warmly espoused her cause. This dark and mysterious affair had put an end to his perplexities, and decided his course. Henceforth Roberjot would belong to the opposition, and so, with the greatest caution and diplomacy, he had drawn up Madame Delorge's complaint against some person or persons unknown. Each circumstance which, in his opinion, went to show that a crime had been committed was duly specified—from Krauss's assertion that the general's sword had never been drawn in a duel down to that seemingly overwhelming proof, the disappearance of the unhappy Cornevin. In conclusion, and so that justice might make no mistake, M. Roberjot named the Comte de Combelaïne in a phrase which, although of very meek appearance, was in reality more terrible than any formal charge. "And now," he said to Madame Delorge, "we can do nothing more—we can only wait."

She did not wait long. Her complaint had been filed on the Tuesday, and on the Wednesday her worthy neighbour, Ducoudray, appeared about five o'clock, dressed in black as if for a funeral, and with a face as solemn as his garments. "They have begun," he cried. "The investigation has commenced. I have just come from the Palais de Justice."

Madame Delorge flushed, for, dreading her friend's remonstrance, she had carefully concealed her complaint from him.

"Yesterday," he continued, "while I was at dinner, I received a summons to appear before the investigating magistrate. Shall I confess that I was really disturbed, for I dislike court rooms and judges very much. However, as there was no escape, I went to the Palais de Justice at eleven o'clock this morning, and was at once ushered into the magistrate's presence. He was a man of about my build, with his hair parted down the middle, and a pair of huge whiskers. His face was very pale, and his lips as thin as threads. He returned my bow politely, but he looked at me from head to foot for a good minute. Then he asked me my name, my age, and my profession, and all at once he most abruptly asked, 'And what do you know about the death of General Delorge?' It was then my turn to look at him, and I did so, and folded my arms. 'I know,' I replied, 'that he was assassinated in the most cowardly manner.'"

Madame Delorge started, and looked at her old friend in utter bewilderment. "You said that!" she cried.

"Yes, just that. Ah! I know what you are thinking, dear madame. You fancy that I have changed very much. But that is not so. I am not a hero; I am, in fact, somewhat a coward, but I am hot-headed, and hot-hearted; and to tell you the truth, I spend half my life regretting what I have done in the other half!" Quite pleased with this explanation of his conduct, M. Ducoudray then returned to his narrative. "My reply did not seem to please the judge; for he gave me a vindictive glance, and, in a tone that turned me all goose-flesh, exclaimed: 'You are going a little too fast, sir.' Thereupon I answered dryly: 'If I move fast it is because I have proofs to back me.' To which he simply replied, 'Ah!' After turning over some papers he began again. 'Let us hear these proofs,' he said, and of course I did not need to be asked twice. I talked so fast that he checked

me three or four times—for you will understand that every word I uttered was taken down on paper.”

In his eagerness the good old gentleman forgot where he was; he gesticulated with unusual violence, and jammed his hat down over his eyes, as he continued: “When I had finished, the magistrate coldly remarked: ‘In all this, sir, I can see your own opinion, but I don’t perceive the slightest proof.’ ‘No proof,’ I exclaimed, and I began again. But he stopped me, saying, ‘That will do; I know everything you can tell me.’ His coolness so exasperated me that I lost my temper, ‘I cannot understand,’ I cried, ‘why General Delorge’s widow was forced to file a complaint herself—justice ought to have forestalled her.’ ‘Why are you so sure,’ asked my man, with a frown, ‘that no steps have been taken?’ But I am not such a fool as to be quieted by such a question. ‘I am not sure,’ I answered; ‘but if any steps have been taken they seem to have been very quickly ended.’ At this the magistrate grew angry. ‘What do you mean by that?’ he exclaimed. ‘Nothing,’ said I, ‘nothing at all, only if the *coup d’état* had not succeeded my friend’s murderer would, no doubt, have been discovered ere now.”

At this point M. Ducoudray drew a long sigh, and shook his head in a dismal fashion, “I said those very words,” he continued, “and I actually shivered at my own audacity. But my thrust had reached home—for the magistrate’s icy coldness left him. ‘Take care, Monsieur Ducoudray,’ he hissed, ‘take care! people who are lacking in respect to those in power are punished severely!’ I wanted to reply; but I heard the gendarmes in the passage outside, and so I dropped my head a little, and assumed a meek attitude. ‘Monsieur Ducoudray,’ continued the magistrate, ‘you must learn that there is no human power that can prevent the course of justice. I should not hesitate to issue a warrant for the arrest of the prime mover in this *coup d’état* if I thought him guilty.’ This sounded very well no doubt, but I knew it was all nonsense. However, I determined to keep this opinion to myself. My evidence was read over to me, and I listened to it with considerable horror, and after I had signed it the dignified magistrate gave me permission to retire. Before I had done so, however, he said to me: ‘Remember that we keep an eye upon you!’ whereupon, I bowed, and came straight here.”

Madame Delorge extended both hands to her visitor, and exclaimed in a feeling voice: “You are a good friend and a good man. Forgive me for having misjudged you.”

But he did not press his lips to her hands. He drearily shook his head. “You judged me correctly,” he answered, “and you owe me no gratitude whatever. It was merely my own folly that made me speak. But what is done is done. And, now, here I am a declared enemy of the government, which has its eye on me! What do you think of that? It was a very different thing to be in the opposition in Louis Philippe’s time.” He paused for a moment, and slightly shuddered as he mentally recapitulated what had occurred. Then raising his voice again, he said, “Well, they may push me to the end if they choose, I won’t retract a word—I’ll stand to my guns. To-night I am going to Madame Cornevin’s which will be a Godsend to the spies who are told off to watch me. Yes, I’ll go, and carry her help and consolation. Yes, madame, you agreed to assume the expense of educating the eldest son, and I’ll do the same for the younger one. That’s settled—and you may be sure I shan’t make the boy an admirer of *coups d’état*—but I must go, so good-night, madame.”

Had the worthy man remained another half hour he would have seen a summons served on Krauss, and have witnessed the terror of the old servant, who was more appalled than if a dozen muskets had been levelled at him. He at once took the paper to Madame Delorge. "What am I to do?" he asked.

If his mistress had told him to say that he had, with his own eyes, seen the general murdered by M. de Combelaïne, he would have done so, without hesitation. "You must tell the truth Krauss," she said, "and only the truth. But you must not allow yourself to be intimidated."

"I'm not afraid; I only want the murderers to be punished," he rejoined. However, he was by no means easy in mind when he set out for the Palais de Justice, and on his return he seemed utterly crushed and dispirited.

"What did they say to you, Krauss?" asked his mistress.

"Not very much."

"Did they ask about the sword?"

"Indeed they did; and the magistrate even sent for two fencing masters, and asked them a lot of questions. At last they told him that in a regular duel the swords must strike each other, but that in a sudden fight it might be different."

"Then what did the magistrate say about my husband not being able to use his right arm?"

"He said that the discussion of that point would be reserved."

After this Madame Delorge did not know what to think. "Will they examine me?" she asked herself; and then she added: "If that magistrate is honest, and will listen to me for ten minutes, there will not remain the shadow of a doubt in his mind."

"But he will not listen to you! It is a political affair—and we are on the losing side," objected M. Ducoudray, who was, however, much mistaken:

On Wednesday, Madame Delorge received a summons to appear on the following day at a fixed hour, and to take her son with her. Why was that? What did they hope to extort from this lad of eleven? Could he say anything that could be used against his father? This fear prevented the poor woman from sleeping, and induced her to repair to M. Roberjot's office, with her son, before going to the Palais de Justice. The valet who opened the door said that his master was at home, but very much engaged with several journalists. "Never mind!" she answered; "I will wait. Take him this card."

The servant thereupon raised no further objection, but showed the widow and Raymond into a small sitting-room. A very thin partition separated this apartment from the lawyer's private office, and as the door was partially open Madame Delorge could not only hear but see. There was a heated discussion going on, and big words and phrases, such as "Resistance"—"Vindication of the rights of the people," and so on were frequently being used. It was quite clear that M. Roberjot was preparing himself for the next elections. Would he condescend to attend to a client at such a moment? It was doubtful, she thought; but in point of fact he soon appeared, having dismissed his political friends.

She raised her eyes to his face and was infinitely astonished at what she saw. The happy, contented lawyer whom she had met at the first interview had seemingly disappeared, and given place to a politician. M. Roberjot had grown ten years older—there were wrinkles on his brow, and his hair and beard were cut differently. Once so careful in his dress, his

clothes were now shabby and old, and his whole person indicated ambition. His eyes were contradictory, for they had a quiet disdainful gleam, which at times seemed to mock the hollow phrases on his tongue. He hurried Madame Delorge into his private office, and taking the summons she handed him, he read it carefully through. He frowned as he finished. "Ah!" he said, musingly, as if answering certain mental objections. "So Barban d'Avranchel has had his finger in this!"

Madame Delorge had noticed his name on the paper. "How will that affect me—for good or evil?" she eagerly asked.

"I hardly know. M. d'Avranchel is an Orleanist, and must be furious at the way things are going. However, a man's conscience is often led far astray by ambition; but he has always been looked upon as a man of probity."

"Then why, pray, ought I to regret that he is connected with with the matter?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "The truth is, this gentleman is not popular as a magistrate. He is cold and hard, and always strikes me as one of those men who put on an air of great solemnity to conceal their deficiency of brains."

Madame Delorge felt her heart sink. Of all misfortunes, there is none worse than to have to deal with a dull, obstinate man. "Another thing troubles me, sir," she said: "Why does he order me to bring my son? Do they wish to make him say something which he might regret in later years?"

The lawyer looked at the boy's intelligent face. "Master Raymond," he answered, with a smile, is far too clever for M. d'Avranchel." And taking the lad's hand, as he spoke, he drew him nearer to his side. "You are not easily abashed, are you?" he asked.

"I am not timid," the boy replied, in a low, steady voice.

"Then it will all go well. An examination, you know, need only terrify those who have anything to conceal." M. Roberjot now rose, and though he continued to speak to Raymond, his words were evidently meant for the mother. "Remember that you are neither to feel nor show any fear when you enter the magistrate's presence. Look him full in the face—listen to his questions, and don't answer them hastily—take time to consider well—and if you do not understand them perfectly, ask to have them repeated. Let your replies be as concise as possible. When he asks you anything which you can answer with a simple yes or no, confine yourself to that. If you are in doubt, say you do not know. No ifs, or buts, or supposes; mind and avoid all air of argument or dispute."

Thus warned and advised, Madame Delorge and her son started off for the Palais de Justice. When she gave her name to the attendant, he politely exclaimed; "This way, madame; M. d'Avranchel is expecting you." The young man's attention was marked, but she was not quite sure that she liked it.

The room which she was shown to was small and very dingy. A ragged carpet covered the floor, while opposite the door stood a mahogany desk, and on the right hand side a table at which a clerk was seated. M. Barban d'Avranchel stood near the chimney-piece. He bowed stiffly and pointed to an arm-chair, but did not speak for a moment or two, and when finally his lips parted it was only to ask: "You are Madame Delorge, *née* Lespéran, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give me your name in full, your age, the place and date of your marriage, the number of your children, and the date of their birth."

Madame Delorge obeyed, and the clerk took down all these particulars. The magistrate, who had installed himself in his arm chair, then turned to Raymond. "Come here, my young friend," he said, adding as Raymond approached him: "Your father, I believe, suffered in one of his arms?"

Standing where he did, Raymond could not see his mother, so he instinctively turned towards her, but the magistrate coldly remarked: "It is not in your mother's eyes that you are to read your replies, but in your own memory. You heard my question. Now answer it."

"Yes, sir; my father's right arm hurt him very badly."

"How do you know that?"

"Because he could not use it. When he gave me my fencing lesson he always used his left arm."

"But was not that to teach you to defend yourself against a left-handed adversary? Perhaps he was left-handed himself?"

"No, sir—I know he was not."

"How do you know it?"

The boy thought for a moment; he had not forgotten M. Roberjot's instructions. "I am sure of it," he answered, slowly, "for papa tried several times to take his foil in his right hand, but he was obliged to drop it, saying, 'I can't, it hurts me too badly.'"

"You mean that it gave him great pain to put himself on guard and hold the foil in his right hand?"

"Yes, sir."

Madame Delorge understood only too well what the magistrate was leading up to, and so she eagerly said: "Allow me to explain, sir."

But the magistrate immediately silenced her. "I beg you not to intervene, madame; it is your son who is now under examination, not yourself." And turning again to Raymond: "So that being the state of the case—your father could not always use his right arm as it pained him, but still it was possible for him to do so?"

The boy became indignant on finding that such a meaning was given to his words. "I did not say that, sir," he replied. "I said that he often tried to use it, and couldn't—and that is very different."

The magistrate did not speak—he seemed busy with some papers on his desk. When he had found what he wanted, he turned to Madame Delorge. "Your servant, madame, one Krauss by name, informed me that the pain the general suffered in his arm was greater sometimes than at others—according to the season."

"Yes, sir, according to the temperature. The day my husband was killed, he suffered more than usual."

"That very morning," interposed Raymond, "we were firing at a target and he could not even lift his pistol in his right hand."

Inexperienced as Madam Delorge was she perfectly realized that the whole matter turned upon this point. "When, in compliance with my request," she continued, hastily, "the commissary of police called at my house at Passy he was accompanied by a physician, who at once examined my husband's body. He must have seen the wounds which my husband received on his arm at Isly when——"

"He did see them," interrupted the magistrate "he has described them also—and I will read what he says;" and so saying he took up a paper. "On the right arm three scars, which might impede the motion of the muscles—but to what extent it is impossible to determine."

"Madame Delorge uttered an indignant exclamation. "What! Is that

all he says?" she cried. "But the scars were terrible ones; one of them alone commenced at the shoulder and extended as far as the elbow. I shall ask for an examination of my husband's body."

Her excitement was increasing, but the magistrate silenced her. "That will do," he cried, authoritatively. "The question is easily settled. The general wore his sword on his left side, and which hand did he use to draw it? Why the right one? I have the evidence of three officers who, since he was wounded, have often seen him do so, and do so on horseback, too, which enhanced the difficulty of the movement. General Delorge's right arm was stiff unquestionably, and in a duel he would probably have used his left one but in a sudden gust of passion, having drawn his sword, as was his habit, with his right hand, he continued to use it regardless of pain, and, in fact he attacked his adversary with it. I use the word attacked advisedly, for I have been informed that he was the aggressor."

At this unexpected charge Madame Delorge flushed crimson. "My husband was murdered, sir," she cried; "murdered—do you understand—and I know by whom."

The magistrate frowned. "Not another word, madame—not another word. You forget that if there be an offence greater than that of leaving a crime unpunished it is that of accusing an innocent person. Justice has neglected nothing in searching for the truth, and we have obtained it. I am, indeed, now about to lay it before you in detail." So saying, he rose, and approaching the chimney-piece, leaned against it. "Your complaint was entirely superfluous," he added, "and it is well you should know so. It was on December 1st that the Commissary of Police at Passy called at your house."

"I sent for him, sir."

"That makes no difference. He and the physician with him were afterwards examined, and a legal inquiry was ordered. You see that Justice never slumbers. Even in these dark and troubled days, when human passions run riot, Justice still watches with her hand on her sword, and as unmoved as the rock beaten by the tempest." M. d'Avranchel stopped short—he had forgotten where he was. "Madame," he resumed, in a scarcely less pompous tone, "on the 5th of December I began investigating this mysterious affair, and to-day, after six weeks' laborious toil, I have torn away the veil that shrouded it. Urbain," he added to his clerk, "bring me the report which I told you to copy yesterday."

The clerk rose and produced a formidable-looking document, whereupon the magistrate, with a stern request to Madame Delorge not to interrupt him, began to read it aloud.

XI.

"On the 30th of November, 1851, at twenty minutes past nine o'clock in the evening, General Pierre Delorge left his residence in the Rue Sainte-Claire, at Passy. He was in full uniform, and wore his sword and his decorations. His servant, Krauss by name, closed the door of the cab No. 739, which drove to the Rue de l'Université, to the house of a retired officer, Colonel César Lefert. What took place there is not known, as Colonel Lefert has left France in consequence of the events of December 2nd. It is only known that General Delorge left the colonel at ten minutes past ten o'clock, having been with him precisely twenty-five minutes, and entered

his cab again, bidding the driver take him as rapidly as possible to the Elysée Palace. The driver states that the general was very excited and disturbed. He reached the Elysée at half-past ten, and found several people there—officers, deputies, and members of the diplomatic body—one of whom Fabio Farussi, who was well known to the general, has been examined by us. Eight or ten ladies were also present but the prince president was absent. After paying his respects to Madame Salvage, who does the honors of the palace, General Delorge went round the rooms and spoke to such of his acquaintance as were there. He was so pale that every one noticed it, and some even asked him if he were ill. His lips trembled—as Monsieur Fabio Farussi states in his deposition—and his eyes had a very strange look. He was constantly asking, “Hasn’t M. de Maumussy come in this evening? Hasn’t M. de Combelaïne arrived?” And each time he uttered these names his hearers were struck by the marked indistinctness of his tone, and it was clear that he had great difficulty in controlling himself. In fact it was impossible for him to converse, and so he went to a card-table and stood looking on at the game. The players also were struck by his peculiar manner; and, when he, himself, began to play, they had to remind him each time that it was his turn to lay down a card, for he kept his eyes fixed on the door instead of on the card-table. This lasted for an hour; when suddenly he rose from his chair and walked away in the middle of a game.

“The Count de Combelaïne had just been announced. The general hurried towards him, and they began to talk with so many gesticulations that every one was surprised. At the same time, however, they spoke in so low a tone, that hardly a word they said could be overheard. ‘Let us find some other place,’ exclaimed the general at last, in an audible voice; ‘we must be somewhere where we can talk freely;’ whereupon M. de Combelaïne replied: ‘Let us wait until Maumussy arrives—I assure you that he is coming.’

“But General Delorge would not listen. ‘If you choose to have a scene here,’ he answered, ‘so be it—only remember that it is none of my seeking.’

“These words decided M. de Combelaïne, and with the general he entered one of the small sitting-rooms which was vacant. They had not been there three minutes when M. de Maumussy joined them. No one else ventured to intrude, but one or two of the guests were so near the open door that it was impossible for them not to see and hear a portion of what took place. For instance, they suddenly heard the general say: ‘You are a villain, M. de Combelaïne—a villain whom I intend to send into another world. You wear a sword—let us go outside.’

“M. de Combelaïne at once replied: ‘You know very well that I am not afraid of a duel, but I don’t choose to have any scandal. Wait until to-morrow.’

“M. de Maumussy did his best to calm them both, addressing first one and then the other. But the general seemed to have lost his head. ‘Come with me now,’ he repeated to De Combelaïne. ‘You must come now or I shall slap your face here in this room.’

“M. de Combelaïne could bear no more.

“Very well! let us go down to the garden at once!’ he cried, and they crossed the room, and went down the stairs.”

“Ah! I was right then,” exclaimed Madame Delorge. “It was he—it was M. de Combelaïne, who murdered my husband!”

Surprised by the audacity of this interruption, the magistrate raised his eyes and fixed them angrily on Madame Delorge. But he resumed reading as if she had not spoken. "The clock was striking half-past eleven when the two men left the room. Their departure attracted comparatively little attention, for at that moment a young English girl of great beauty, and greater talent, had just gone to the piano, and most of the guests were anxious to hear her. However, several officers started to follow General Delorge and M. de Combelaïne, but they were stopped by the Viscount de Maumussy. Three of these officers have been examined and their testimony is the same. They aver that M. de Maumussy was calm and quite self-possessed, and that he said: 'Don't trouble yourselves, gentlemen—it's a mere trifle. Delorge boils over as easily as a saucepan of milk. I will arrange it myself.'

"Still one of the general's friends, Monsieur Fabio Farussi, insisted on following him. 'Take care, said M. de Maumussy: 'you know that a quarrel becomes more difficult to smooth over with each additional spectator.'

"However, M. Farussi would not yield the point, and he and Maumussy went out together. Their discussion lasted some little time. In fact, a quarter of an hour had elapsed when they asked a lackey in the vestibule where the general had gone. 'Into the garden,' was the reply. They hurried out, but hardly had they reached the lower step, than they met M. de Combelaïne, who was pale and agitated, with a sword in his hand. 'It is horrible!' he cried; 'horrible—and for such a trifle too!'

"What do you mean?"

"Delorge!—I think I have killed him—he threw himself on my sword, and fell without a sound.'

"Where?"

"Behind the hedge—there where you see the light.' And throwing down his sword, M. de Combelaïne rushed away as if pursued by an avenging fury.

"Never," said M. Farussi in his evidence, 'did I see a man in such despair.' And, unfortunately, this despair was only too well founded. When M. de Maumussy and M. Fabio Farussi reached the general, they found him breathing his last."

Madame Delorge was listening like a prisoner on the rack, whose stoicism will not even allow him to groan. "I accept all those details, sir," she said, in a choked voice; "but is there one of them, I ask you, which proves that my husband was not assassinated?"

"Enough, madame!" rejoined the magistrate, sternly. "Listen to the rest of this report, and you will see what the law has ascertained." And then he began to read again: "It has been the duty of the investigation to ascertain what took place from the moment when the two adversaries left the room in the palace together, till that, when one of them was found lying dead in the garden, and with this object, before questioning M. de Combelaïne, it was deemed best to collect other evidence. One witness, Buc by name, the lackey who was on the stairs when the two adversaries passed him, stated that what he saw and heard astonished him so much that he remembered every word. The general, he says, was the first to go down the stairs, and at each step he turned with an insulting epithet to M. de Combelaïne—'His insults were so gross,' said Buc, in his evidence, 'that I would have strangled any man who dared to address them to me!' Two other servants saw them pass and noticed their excited manner, but they heard or remembered nothing of what they said. The general still led the way. Near the

garden door they met the private secretary of the Minister of the Interior, who was struck by their odd manner, and spoke to them, but obtained no answer. He heard M. de Combelaïne say: 'Come, this is preposterous—wait until to-morrow.'

"However, they went out into the garden, leaving the door half open. Hardly knowing why, the secretary approached the steps, and heard M. de Combelaïne call a groom and bid him bring a lantern from the stables. This groom knew the truth, and we have his evidence."

Madame Delorge started up. "Have you found him?" she cried. "Have you found the man who held the lantern?"

"Yes, madame—we have found him and questioned him—and thinking that you yourself might like to speak to him, I have him in the next room. Urbain!" he said to his clerk, "call in the witness."

Madame Delorge was utterly bewildered. "What, is it really so?" she asked in a trembling voice. "Have you found the poor man, whom his wife believes to be dead, and whom she is now wearing mourning for—Laurent Cornevin——"

"I do not know any Cornevin, madame."

"Good heavens, sir—it was he who——"

"It was he whom you mentioned in your complaint; but you were deceived. It was not he who obeyed M. de Combelaïne's summons and ran forward with a lantern, and this point is easily proved, for Cornevin was not on duty that night."

"But I am sure of what I stated, sir."

"Very well, madame; tell me on what basis your certainty is founded."

Rapidly, and with great vehemence, Madame Delorge gave her reasons. But alas!—as she spoke, these reasons, which had lately seemed to her all powerful, now grew weak and tame. Why was she so sure that the man who held the lantern was Cornevin? The only reason she could adduce was that he had come the next day to Passy, and left his address at her house, and that he had since totally disappeared. The magistrate, still calm and cold, allowed the poor woman to flounder about in the sea of perplexity for some time. But at last he intervened. "You must admit, madame," he said, "that there is really nothing in all this which justifies your statement. Carried away by your grief, you have accepted as truths the fancies of a man whose age ought to have rendered him more circumspect. I allude to your neighbour, that extremely ignorant and headstrong person, M. Ducoudray."

From the contemptuous manner in which these words were uttered, it was easy to see that Ducoudray had greatly displeased the magistrate.

"So then," angrily exclaimed Madame Delorge, "we have dreamed that Cornevin has disappeared——"

"Madame!"

"And even-handed, infallible Justice is quite unmoved by this man's mysterious disappearance and the misery of his family."

For the first time the magistrate's impassive face evinced a human sentiment—anger. "The strong arm of the law," he said, "is yet busy searching for Laurent Cornevin. As yet——"

"He has not been found!"

"No, but all goes to show that he was not among those slain on the occasion of the *coup d'état*. We are inclined to believe that he is among those disturbers of the peace who were arrested, and that he gave a false name to put the police off the track."

"Why should he do so?"

"Perhaps from a desire to disconnect himself from his past life. But why should we trouble ourselves about this man—he is nothing to us!"

"Nothing to us!" cried Madame Delorge, and starting up from her chair she continued, "I tell you that this man must be found, for he alone knows the truth, which you believe you know. In the name of my dead husband, in the name of my children, and the Cornevin family, I command you to find this man!"

This was too much for the magistrate's patience. With an imperious wave of the hand, he silenced Madame Delorge and then proceeded: "Not another word like that, madame! Do you know who these Cornevins are, these people in whom you interest yourself so much? I can show you the truth if you are ignorant of it." And so speaking he drew from his desk two papers bearing the seal of the Prefect of Police, and handed one of them to Madame Delorge. "Read this, if you please," he added.

She took the document in her hands and read as follows: "Cornevin (Laurent), thirty-two years of age, born at Fécamp. Residing at Montmartre, Rue Mercadet. Married to Julie Cochard—five children. Cornevin has left no good reputation behind him at the various situations he has held as stable boy and groom. He knew his business and fulfilled his duties, but he was insolent and brutal. Found guilty in 1846 of assault and battery, he would have been sent to prison but for the entreaties of one of his former masters. In 1850 he was engaged at the Elysée Palace; he had just left the Marquis d'Arange, who gave him a very good character, but we all know what that amounts to. At the Elysée everybody began by liking and praising him, but his deplorable disposition for quarreling soon evinced itself, and he was solely kept for his punctuality and experience. In 1851 he suddenly changed; he became the boon companion of a band of rascals, and was an intimate friend of a wine-shop politician, who was afterwards punished for theft. It had just been decided that Cornevin must be sent away, when suddenly he disappeared without a word of warning. His month's wages are still due him."

As soon as Madame Delorge had finished perusing this document, the magistrate handed her the second one which was couched in these terms: "Julie Cochard, wife of Cornevin (Laurent), twenty-eight years of age, and born in Paris. Is looked upon in her neighbourhood (Montmartre) as a good wife and house-keeper, and her morals, it is said, are all they should be—at all events since her marriage. It would be difficult to say precisely what her previous conduct was, for she had plenty of very bad examples among her relatives. Her father was imprisoned several times for theft, and her mother's morals were very bad. Julie Cochard's eldest sister, Adèle, was formerly a ballet-girl, and she is now known in certain society as Flora Misri."

If the magistrate had relied upon these police reports to separate Madame Delorge from the Cornevin family, he found himself egregiously mistaken. She did not indulge in a word of comment—and for many reasons. In the first place, the interest she took in the Cornevins was independent of all these circumstances. "Cornevin knew the truth," she thought to herself; "the eagerness with which he hastened to me is the cause of his disappearance. Besides, notwithstanding the language used in these documents, what did these accusations amount to? It was said that the husband was brutal and coarse—and why not? If he had received the education of a gentleman, he would certainly not have been a groom. On the other hand the wife was reproached with the conduct of her mother, her father, and her sister, but there was not a word against herself." These reflections flashed through

Madame Delorge's mind, but she in no wise mentioned them as she handed the papers back to the magistrate.

"Who then is the man who held the lantern?" she asked.

"A comrade of Cornevin's," answered the magistrate; "a man named Grollet."

Madame Delorge started. That was the name of the man whom Madame Cornevin had been to see, who had been so kind to her, kept her to breakfast, and elicited from her all the information necessary to play his part. "Ah! Grollet indeed!" said Madame Delorge, replying to her own objections rather than addressing the magistrate.

"Yes, and a very honest man he is, too—loved and respected by all about him. I have made every inquiry, and hear nothing but praise of him. But here he comes, so you can judge for yourself."

The door opened, and, behind Urbain, the magistrate's clerk, there came a tall fellow, who looked somewhat frightened and embarrassed. "Come in, my good fellow," said the magistrate. "Come a little nearer."

Madame Delorge scanned the new comer closely; he had what is commonly known as a good face, with full cheeks, a flat nose, and a large mouth with sensual lips. His eyes alone struck one by their mobility.

"Grollet," said the magistrate, "have the goodness to describe to me the scene you witnessed in the Garden of the Elysée Palace on the night of November 30th."

"Oh! let me think a moment, sir."

"Certainly. Begin at the moment you were summoned."

Grollet twisted the Scotch cap he held in his hands, scratched his head, and then, in a trembling hesitating fashion began: "Well, it was Sunday evening, about half past eleven; I was rubbing down an aide-de-camp's horse when I suddenly heard a voice: 'Hullo, there! Bring a lantern at once!' This may be a means of earning a little money, I said to myself, and so unhooking a lantern, I hastened to the garden. I saw two gentlemen there, M. de Combelaïne, whom I had often seen, and a general, whom I afterwards heard was General Delorge. They were standing so close to one another that their faces nearly touched, and they were calling each other the most terrible names. As soon as I appeared one of them, the general, said—'Here comes a light!' and then stamping his feet, he continued—'On guard! on guard.' Then drawing his sword as he spoke, he made a thrust at M. de Combelaïne, which I thought would cut him in two. But no; the count sprang on one side, and threw out his arm in such a way that when the general lunged he threw himself on his adversary's sword, which entered his side. He did not even groan; but threw up his arms and fell to the ground——"

On hearing this, Raymond, poor boy, burst into passionate sobs. But Madame Delorge did not weep—her wound was bleeding inwardly. "Then my husband did not speak a single word?" she asked.

"No, madame, not one—Ah! yes, I ran to the general and knelt at his side—and he did say something I could not understand, but I thought it was Elise."

This, in Madame Delorge's estimation, was the finishing touch of iniquity. Her husband's enemies had taught her name to this man so as to give an air of reality to his story.

"Oh, this is infamous!" she exclaimed.

"Madame," rejoined the magistrate indignantly.

"Don't you see that this man is repeating a lesson learned by heart? Don't you see that this man is a false witness?" resumed the widow.

"You are insulting a worthy man and justice——"

But she was not listening to him. She had risen and approached Grollet. "Do you dare tell me on your oath that you are not a false witness? Look me in the face if you dare!"

White, and with lowered head, Grollet retreated to the wall. "I have told the truth," he stammered.

"You lie! The man who held the lantern was Cornevin. It was the poor fellow whose friend you pretended to be, and whose wife you welcomed with hypocritical tears. It was Cornevin, I say—and I believe that he himself has since been murdered because he witnessed the crime—and now you——"

Trembling like a leaf, Grollet tried to raise his hand. "I swear," he murmured, "before God I swear——"

"Don't swear," interrupted Madame Delorge. "Tell us, rather, how much these men have given you to purchase your assistance. However large the sum may have been you have thrown yourself away. To-morrow you will realize that each one of your gold pieces is stained with blood. Listen, now, to the voice of your conscience, and remember that the truth will certainly become known."

Madame Delorge had nearly won the day, for Grollet caught his breath, stunned by this explosion of anger and grief, and seemed to shrink into himself. Ah, if the magistrate had been one of those shrewd men who can dive into consciences! But, no. Firmly entrenched behind the belief in his own infallibility, he saw and heard nothing save Madame Delorge's haughtiness and tone of authority, and, irritated by what he considered an assumption of his own prerogatives he exclaimed: "Madame, you exceed all bounds!"

"Ah, sir!" rejoined the poor woman, "if you would only——"

But there was no longer time. Cornevin's old friend had had time to measure the peril he had incurred, and straightening himself up like a drowning man, preparing for one last supreme effort, he exclaimed: "If I were to be burned alive I couldn't tell you more than I have!"

The moment that decides human destinies was past, as Madame Delorge understood; and, dizzy with disappointment, she sank into her arm-chair at her son's side.

The magistrate made a few severe remarks respecting the danger of such passionate outbursts, and declared that he would defend his witness against a repetition of such attacks. "Go on, my friend," he continued, turning to Grollet.

The witness obeyed, and in a more confident tone of voice exclaimed: "When the Viscount de Maumussy, and another gentleman who hastened to the spot, realized that the general was dead, they said: 'We must conceal this terrible misfortune from every one, and more especially from the prince president! What shall be done?' Thereupon I ventured to mention a disused room which I had the key of, and M. de Maumussy quickly answered: 'You are right. Come at once.' We three carried the body into this room without being seen by any one, and for a long time I was left alone with the general's body, as M. de Maumussy and M. Farussi had gone back to the palace to find a physician. They wanted the key, too, of one of the private doors of the Elysée, and they kept on saying: 'The president will never forgive us if he should hear of this!' At about three o'clock in the morning they returned with a doctor, who as soon as he lifted the cloak that covered the general, said: 'My presence is useless—death must have been instantaneous.' Thereupon the gentlemen talked earnestly together, and it was finally decided that the general's body must be taken to his own house before

dawn. However, they hesitated as to which of them ought to accompany the doctor. I was sent for a cab, and when I returned the body was placed in it, and the vehicle drove away. It was then that M. de Maumussy took me aside. 'Grollet,' he said, 'if ever a word passes your lips respecting this night's occurrence, remember that your place, which is a good one, is lost.' Naturally I swore to hold my tongue, except, of course, if the law commanded me to speak. To-day I have told you the whole truth."

"That will do," said the magistrate approvingly; "you can now retire." And as soon as Grollet was gone he turned to Madame Delorge. "You will now admit, madame," he said, "the injustice of your accusations."

The unhappy woman rose slowly from her chair. "You have obeyed the dictates of your conscience, sir—I cannot reproach you," she replied. "The future will show which of us is mistaken. Good morning." And taking her boy by the hand, she added: "Come, Raymond, we have nothing more to do in the Palais de Justice." Thereupon she departed, leaving M. d'Avranchel singularly disturbed.

"If this woman should be right, after all, and we all wrong!" he muttered when he was alone. "In that case I have been successfully imposed upon by villains, and am the dupe of a most successfully played comedy. In that case—but no, no, it is impossible! This woman is mad, and M. de Combelaïne is innocent."

XII.

"EXACTLY what I expected!" said M. Roberjot, when Madame Delorge, who repaired at once to his office, gave him an account of the foregoing proceedings. "And yet," he added, thoughtfully, "D'Avranchel cannot be suspected of connivance."

"You wouldn't say that, sir, if, like me, you had seen that man Grollet ready to fall on his knees—ready to ask pardon and confess everything!"

The lawyer shook his head. "Neither of us, dear madame, are good judges, for we are interested parties and our opinions are already fixed. You must find an impartial arbiter, and give him all the particulars of your husband's death as they have been enumerated by M. d'Avranchel. Lay before him the testimony of all these witnesses who agree in so singular a fashion, and when you have done that what do you think the arbiter will reply? Why, he will tell you, 'Madame, all the probabilities are in favor of M. de Combelaïne.'" He leant his elbow on his desk as he spoke, and then added, thoughtfully: "There's no use attempting to disguise it, these people are strong—very strong."

Nothing displeased Madame Delorge so much as any tribute paid to the sagacity of her enemies. "And so," she remarked in a tone of bitter irony, "you intend to bow down before these strong people?"

The lawyer looked very much surprised. "I don't understand you," he said.

She did not reply, but her very silence was significant.

"So, then, you class me with Dr. Buiron, do you?" asked M. Roberjot. "And why, pray? I am one of those persons who submit to an accomplished event, but who never accept it. The proof of this is that this new government, this government founded on the atrocious crime of the 2nd of December, will find no bitterer opponent than myself." As she spoke he looked at Madame Delorge with a peculiar expression, and then continued, in a voice

which perceptibly trembled: "A week ago I could not have expressed myself so decidedly, for, I will confess it, I was then hesitating. But you came here, and, without your own knowledge, you decided my future."

Then, after taking several turns up and down the room, he resumed: "And yet no one had so many reasons for acquiescing. What have I to ask of life that it has not generously given me? I am still young—I have ample means, and I have succeeded at the bar far beyond my hopes——"

But Madame Delorge was in no mood to notice her companion's strange agitation. One fixed idea had taken possession of her life. "What are we to do now?" she abruptly asked.

If M. Roberjot was somewhat shocked at being interrupted in this fashion, he had the good sense to conceal it. "To do now? Nothing! We must wait."

"Wait for what?"

"For the opportunity which never fails to come to those who know how to wait patiently."

Madame Delorge turned away despairingly. "Alas!" she cried, "every day that passes divests me of one of my hopes. Yesterday I met one of my husband's old friends, and he hardly bowed to me. In a year he will say, 'Delorge!—who's Delorge?' My husband was a noble, a valiant soldier—but will this reputation follow him to his grave? No—those slanders which you yourself repeated to me, will remain like so many stains on his memory. In ten years from now my son will have become a man, and some of those folks who know everybody's affairs, will say, 'Oh, he's the son of General Delorge, you know, who was killed in a duel arising out of some scandalous money transaction.'"

But Raymond started to his feet. "No, mamma, no," he exclaimed; "when I'm a man no one will ever dare to say that!"

The lawyer took the boy's hands in his. "You are right, my lad," he said—"very right; and you, madame, are mistaken—you have everything to hope from time. The general is more to be dreaded now than ever."

"Alas! sir, if I could but believe you."

"You must believe me. The proverb which says, 'The dead are the only ones who never return,' is absurd, for in politics they are the only ones who do return. It would be very easy to rule if we could put persons well under ground as soon as they begin to be troublesome. But a government goes on triumphantly, braves all opposition, and laughs at all attacks; it has its creatures, its judges, and its soldiers; it believes in itself, and finds plenty of people to believe in it as well; but some fine morning somebody wanders into a cemetery, spells out some forgotten name on a tombstone, and utters it aloud—and the sound of this name spoken afresh comes like an earthquake—the government crumbles into dust."

Madame Delorge sighed. "Ah!" said she, "I shall never see what you desire."

"Who knows? When I tell you that there is nothing to be done I don't wish to be understood as advising a cowardly resignation. By no means—for we still have Cornevin."

"Cornevin!" slowly repeated Madame Delorge.

"Yes, for it is on this man that all our hopes depend," continued M. Roberjot. "Has he been assassinated? I don't think so. M. de Combelaïne is too wise to risk committing a crime which was not indispensable. But in the recent tumult it was easy to conjure Cornevin away. If he has been arrested, it is our business to discover where he is imprisoned."

"I have thought a great deal about Cornevin myself," answered the widow. "I believe him to be still alive, and I believe he has it in his power to provide me with all the weapons I need for my revenge. With this belief, indeed, I have done my best to attach his wife to me."

"You know her, then?"

"Certainly! and I have agreed to give her a small annuity. The eldest of her sons, moreover, will be educated with my lad, and precisely in the same way." The lawyer looked at his client in such utter amazement that she added: "Was not this a sacred duty?"

"It may be so," answered Roberjot, "but it is the height of imprudence." She opened her lips to expostulate, but he gave her no time to speak. "Do you think I blame you, madame?" he cried. "Most assuredly not. But you must not allow your acts to be known. Help this woman and her family as much as you choose, but let it be done as quietly as possible."

"And why, sir?"

"Simply because if Laurent Cornevin seems to be abandoned by all the world he will soon be forgotten. But to give his wife your support openly, is to call attention to him. Poor and friendless, he could in no way meet his powerful enemies. But as the ally of the widow of General Delorge, he becomes a permanent danger. Oblivion would be his best chance for liberty. Your name written in the prison register against his own means indefinite confinement. The day you received his wife, madame, you double-locked his prison door."

Madame Delorge lowered her head in profound discouragement, for she realised the truth and justice of this reasoning. She saw, moreover, that M. Roberjot's and M. Ducoudray's advice were one and the same. To keep quiet, to work, if work she must, like a mole, underground, was all she could and ought to do. Still the very word wait, made the blood boil in her veins, and there were moments when she could hardly restrain herself. She felt that her own right hand was armed with sufficient strength to enable her to transpierce the heart of the man who had robbed her of her husband and her happiness. "My mistake is irreparable," she said, at last; "and to act differently now would be only to add another blunder to the first."

"There is another point to be considered," rejoined the lawyer; "a man like M. de Combeldaine with such a past life as his own must have a great deal to conceal. We must discover some of the particulars of his past life. My position will give me certain facilities, and with reasonable adroitness on my part I may find out the truth; but I must first have authority from you."

As this interview proceeded, M. Roberjot's feelings gained the better of him. He gazed fixedly and almost lovingly on Madame Delorge, and, lawyer as he was, he bungled and hesitated in his words. But the widow saw nothing of it, the woman in her had died on that fatal night when her husband's body was brought home. The idea that she could ever love again, that any one could raise his eyes to her, would have seemed sacrilege as it were. M. Roberjot saw that he was not understood, and he came to a sudden determination. "My boy," he said to Raymond, "there are some fine engravings on the table in my drawing-room; will you go and look at them while I talk to your mamma."

Left alone with Madame Delorge, he moved restlessly in his chair, played with his pen, and coughed. He was afraid of speaking the words that rose to his lips, and at last, in view of regaining countenance, he reverted to the business on hand. "I told you, madame, the first time I

saw you," he said, "that your cause was mine, that I had espoused it. You have spoken to me of M. de Combelaïne's deposition, which the magistrate read to you——"

"No, sir, you are mistaken—he did not read it to me; I did not give him time."

"But did you not see that this deposition was of the utmost importance to you? I would have told you the motive which De Combelaïne chose to attribute to his duel with your husband."

Madame Delorge sighed. "Ah," said she, "this is another mistake I have made. But this one I can, at least, repair, for I can ask Monsieur d'Avranchel for a copy of the deposition."

Roberjot shook his head. "It would be useless," he answered, "for M. de Combelaïne has already spread it abroad."

"And what does he say?"

"He attributes his altercation with General Delorge to a personal private matter. Upon my word, madame, I hardly know how to speak of it."

"I can bear anything, sir."

"Very well, then; De Combelaïne affirms that General Delorge could not forgive his attentions to a certain lady——"

He paused, expecting an explosion of jealousy, but Madame Delorge calmly smiled. "That is absurd," she replied.

"So I said," hastily rejoined the lawyer, ashamed of his own hope.

"It is as ridiculous as it is odious," continued the widow, with the proud confidence of a woman sure of the noble love she had inspired. "M. de Combelaïne is really very ingenious in his inventions." She smiled sadly as she spoke, and then added, in a tone of utter contempt: "And does any one know who that lady may be?"

"Yes—she is a very pretty person—very well known—and is said to have spent De Combelaïne's money very freely."

"I thought he had none to spend."

"So did I; but people who are better informed than myself say that he was beggared by this very Flora Misri."

"Flora Misri!" exclaimed Madame Delorge—"Is that woman M. de Combelaïne's mistress?"

"She has been so for many years, I believe," answered the lawyer, who was unable to understand his client's emotion. "Do you know anything of this woman?" he asked.

"Yes, I know her, sir," she replied; and emphasizing each word as she spoke, she continued: "This woman's true name is Adèle Corchard. She is the sister of Laurent Cornevin's wife."

Roberjot could not believe his ears. "Are you sure of what you say, madame?"

"Certainly, I am. I heard the name for the first time this morning in the office of the magistrate, who considered it almost a crime on Madame Cornevin's part that she was the sister of such a woman."

The lawyer began to reflect, bringing all his intellect to bear upon this point in view of seeing what advantage he could derive from it. "This woman," he muttered, "must naturally know more than almost anybody else about De Combelaïne's past life—probably more than even the Baroness d'Eljonsen knows. But how are we to get at her? How can we open her mouth?"

Madame Delorge did not lose a word of his remarks. "Perhaps we might obtain some information about this woman from Madame Cornevin," she said.

"Do they see each other?"

"Ah! I don't know—I doubt it, however."

"If they are not on good terms, then, a visit at the present moment would awaken suspicion at once."

"But Cornevin's wife is very intelligent."

"No doubt; and then the disappearance of her husband would be a pretext for a renewal of intercourse. But of course De Combelaïne knows that Madame Cornevin and Flora are sisters, and I should not be surprised if he were already on the watch." Roberjot relapsed again into thought, but suddenly he exclaimed: "I must have time to arrange a plan, for one imprudent step would be fatal. I must feel my way. One of my friends is very intimate with the Baroness d'Eljonsen, and, I am sure, he can tell me something which will be useful."

"The Baroness d'Eljonsen?" repeated Madame Delorge, to whom this name conveyed no information.

"Yes, she is the lady who brought De Combelaïne up. It is said she was the most faithful of all the prince-president's friends when he was in exile," replied the lawyer, and then he added, in a tone of calm firmness: "Come what may, madame, you can rely on me. I will do all that human ability can do—only——" he hesitated—"only you must allow me to call on you, for urgent circumstances might arise——"

Madame Delorge did not allow him to finish. "Is it necessary, sir, for me to assure you that you will always be welcome under my roof?" She rose as she spoke, for she had heard some one walking about impatiently in the waiting-room. "I beg your pardon, sir," she added, "for having kept you so long;" and calling Raymond, she drew her long widow's veil over her face and took her leave.

"Ah! that woman knows how to love," muttered the lawyer with a sigh; and then, as if feeling the need of air, he threw open the window and glanced down the street. He was looking for Madame Delorge, and he soon saw her cross the pavement in the direction of her cab, enter it, and drive rapidly away. Clients were waiting for him in the next room; he had heard them, but he did not care—he still leaned on the window-sill, insensible to the cold, and oblivious of everything around him, for he was wrapped in one of those reveries which absorb every faculty.

M. Roberjot was by no means an inexperienced or a simple man. In common with most lawyers, he had had many young and attractive clients, of whom more than one had said to him with tearful eyes: "You are my only hope and reliance! My honour, my happiness, my very life depend on you." M. Roberjot had done much for these fair clients, but never before had his own heart been touched as Madame Delorge had touched it. His life was entirely upset—all his ideas were modified—a new horizon seemed offered to his gaze, and he hardly knew himself. "Can I be in love?" he asked himself, without realizing that those words were at once question and answer. In love—he! An old sceptic—a lawyer absorbed in musty books! But the idea which a fortnight earlier would have struck him as the height of absurdity, did not now bring a smile to his lips. Why shouldn't he be in love, and why not with Madame Delorge? Had she not the freshness and modest grace of a girl? Where could he find a more tender heart, united with greater courage and energy, and higher intelligence? Suddenly he started. "But she," he thought; "she will never love me."

He then took a rapid survey of what he called his chances. Alas! he

saw none. A man might triumph over a rival were that rival living; but how could he expect to efface from a woman's heart the memory of a man who was now invested with every superhuman quality? "There is only one way of reaching her," thought the lawyer. "It must be through gratitude. Nothing will touch her like the hope of avenging her murdered husband. Will she not give herself to the man who helps her in that task?"

He became so excited at this idea that he would have liked to call out the Count de Combelaïne that very moment. But a slight noise caused him to turn, and on doing so he saw one of his servants on the threshold of the room. "What do you want?" he asked in an irritated tone.

"There are two clients to see you, sir."

"Let them come back to-morrow."

"And the stout contractor is here, sir, the one who has so many men employed—the one who is interested in your election, I mean, sir."

"Let him go to the devil!"

The servant stood open-mouthed in surprise, for the word election generally produced a very different effect with his master.

"Say that I am very much occupied, and can see no one this evening," resumed the lawyer.

"Then, sir, I must tell M. Verdale——"

"M. Verdale! Is he here as well? Why the deuce did you not say so before? Show him in at once."

This eagerness may be explained by the fact that M. Verdale was the friend whom M. Roberjot had mentioned to Madame Delorge—the one who was acquainted with the Baroness d'Eljonsen, the patroness of the Count de Combelaïne.

XIII.

M. VERDALE was a tall, stout man, with huge coarse hands. He was frightfully common-looking, but by no means deficient either in intelligence or acuteness. An architect by profession, he had obtained the Grand State Prize which enabled him to sojourn for three years at Rome at the expense of the Government, and nominally for purposes of study. He returned to Paris with a portfolio full of plans and drawings, and with the determination to make his fortune as quickly as possible, and not to be over-scrupulous as to the means he used in doing so. Still for ten years he had only pursued shadows. His plans had never left his portfolio. He was still poor, and more eager than ever to become rich. At college he and Roberjot had known each other well, and although their paths in life had become totally different, they still kept up friendly intercourse. More than once had the unappreciated architect, as he called himself, called on his old class-mate for a loan of a couple of hundred francs, or for a word of advice respecting the little business which came to him now and then. However, poverty and disappointment had not changed his nature. He was always gay, impudent, and vulgar, and rattled on in a sort of dialect of his own—composed of professional phrases, souvenirs of classical study, and quotations picked up at the theatres.

He now entered his friend's private room brandishing a long roll of paper. "What's up," he cried, "that you sit here alone and make everybody wait? Have you become a minister?"

"Not yet."

"But you are to be elected as a deputy, if I am to believe report."

"My friends urge me to become a candidate, I admit, but I have not yet decided."

The architect screamed with laughter. "Poor, dear boy!" he cried, "how your shrinking, violet-like modesty must suffer! Cruel friends—sad obligations! But hesitation would be a crime; it is great, it is glorious to sacrifice oneself for one's country!"

Accustomed as he was to his friend's ways, Roberjot smiled, although he was hardly in a smiling mood.

"In short," resumed Verdale, "you feel your stomach strong enough to swallow all the toads and vipers of such a position; you mean to become a deputy? And a member of the Opposition, I presume?"

"Most assuredly."

"And yet you know what Thiers has said—'The Empire is made!'"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "We will unmake it then!"

M. Verdale took off his hat. "Accept my thanks," he said; "your confidence delights me." And then, in a tone of feigned humility, he added: "No, let it last—this empire—at least long enough to allow me to make my fortune. You will do that for an old friend, I am sure. Just let me make enough money to pay you what I owe you."

"You think, then, that you will grow rich under the empire?"

"I do, indeed; and as there are nowadays some fifty thousand men in Paris who have the same belief, I am inclined to fancy that the empire will last!"

"The deuce it will!"

"I don't say that everybody will succeed, but I shall. I am told that the emperor, or the prince president rather, has gorgeous plans. Well, I have some equally gorgeous ones, and we can do a great deal together. Just let him say the word and my portfolio opens. He wants a Paris of marble, and I'm ready to build him a city of palaces! There will be millions spent, and I fancy that a trifle will fall into my pocket."

Verdale had a quick scent, as his friend well knew. "And so," said the latter, "you intend to pay court to the president?"

"Oh! not yet. But I'm gradually creeping near him, through patrons to whom nothing will be refused. The president may have all the vices that are ascribed to him, but he also possesses a marvellous memory. It's only necessary to have said 'God bless you' to him when he was in exile for him to consider that you have a claim on his gratitude."

"But will the folks about him have as good a memory as he has? Won't they influence him?"

"No; I know where the skeleton's hidden!" cried the architect. And then, as if annoyed at his own eagerness, he added: "When I say that I mean I am acquainted with sufficient things to prevent folks from forgetting me. To give you a proof of it, I may tell you that the paper I hold in my hand is the plan of a mansion which the Baroness d'Eljonsen is going to build in the Champs Elysées."

"The baroness going to build! Why, not a month ago I heard that she was in great need."

"Yes, when she was at Rome. But times have changed—so changed, indeed, that M. de Maumussy has commissioned me to find him a suitable estate between the Seine and the Champs Elysées; so changed that M. de Combelaïne wants a plan for a country house; so terribly changed that M. Coutanceau has promised to appoint me chief architect of a building society

which he means to found, with a capital of—I don't know how many millions. So you see these men don't merely know how to conquer, but they know how to reap the advantages of victory as well!"

The lawyer shook his head, and then in a significant tone he said: "I see you are on the road to become a millionaire."

"I certainly am," answered the architect, "only"—and he slightly frowned, and proceeded in a graver voice—"only while the future is mine, the present belongs to my creditors. I am in the situation of a man who has inherited a large fortune which is lying idle and waiting for him at Marseilles, while he himself is dying of hunger in Paris, without a penny to pay his railway fare from Paris to Marseilles!"

Verdale's visit was now explained. "Well," said the lawyer—as if he did not understand——

"Well, my dear boy, it is for you to rescue me from starvation by enabling me to buy a ticket for the express train which will take me from zero to millions. I want eight thousand francs."

"The deuce you do!" cried his friend. "Do you think I'm a banker and have nothing to do but unlock my safe? Eight thousand francs! Why, that's just half my annual income; and not only have I not got it, but I don't know where I could obtain it!"

The architect colored. "And yet I must have it, and within forty-eight hours, too!"

"But what on earth do you want with such an amount?"

"I wish to make a dash with it!"

"Good Heaven! I thought you far above such follies."

"I was so, and that is the very rock which has brought me to grief!"

"What do you mean?"

"Precisely what I say. You are the son of a rich family, and you have not had to learn that fools refuse to recognize talent unless it is set in a rich frame. You have talent of your own of course, and a fair measure of success, but do you fancy that your beautiful apartment, your furniture, carpets, pictures, and books, count for nothing in your success? When clients ring at your bell a stylish man-servant opens the door, and the client who meant to pay you fifty francs for your opinion, says to himself, 'I must make it a hundred, I see, from this valet.' And then when he is shown into your waiting-room and sees the old oak furniture, he mentally adds on a little more; and finally when he enters this room he is fairly dazzled, and before going out he leaves a hundred and fifty francs on your table."

The lawyer laughed.

"I wish to do the same," continued the architect. "I now live on the fourth floor of a wretched house where no one would take the trouble to come to find me. All this must be changed, my friend. The new rule ought to be called the rule of 'dust in the eyes.' So let us throw our share of dust!"

M. Roberjot hesitated. He did not feel willing to flatter the hopes of the unappreciated architect to the tune of eight thousand francs, but to refuse them meant the loss of the assistance he most needed, in carrying out his dearest plans, and indeed Roberjot would have gladly sacrificed far more than this amount to unmask M. de Combelaïne, and throw him, bound hand and foot, at Madame Delorge's feet. Like all hesitating persons, he took a third course. "I don't say you are wrong," he remarked to his friend: "but do you really require the amount you have named? Would not half as much do?—at least for the present? Later on I might do more."

Verdale's eyes gleamed bright with hope. "No," he said; "I need every copper of it."

"But——"

"But me no buts—I've no time to rise slowly. I want to burst forth like a meteor, and I must come up in the night like a mushroom. It is no use for you to point to yourself as an example. You started early in life, and you were pushed by your family. But I'm no longer young, in fact I feel as old as some of the streets I want to demolish. My mother, who was a market fish-woman, wouldn't be of much assistance to me I fancy. You know my position; you know that I am married and have a boy eleven years old, and that on account of my poverty I'm obliged to let wife and son live in the country with my stingy old father-in-law, who reproaches them at every meal with what they eat, and writes to me regularly every month that I am a worthless scamp, and that if I can't get work as an architect, I ought to turn mason!" He was becoming extremely excited, and talked so fast that his friend could not put in a word. "For a long time," he continued, "I laughed at this situation, but now I weep at it. The front is becoming moldy, the walls are shaky, and I feel draughts all about me. It's dreary work living alone when a man has a pretty little wife. My beard is growing white; I am tired of this Bohemian life—in short, tired of creeping along in the ditches. I want to catch you up at one leap. I have as much ability as yourself. I took the grand prize!"

"I admit all that, my friend."

"Well, then—lend me what I ask, and to-morrow I shall have an apartment, to which clients will speedily learn their way when it is shown them by the Baroness d'Eljonsen, by the Count de Combelaïne, and the Viscount de Maumussy."

The lawyer still hesitated. "Why don't you go to the people you name?"

Verdale shrugged his shoulders—shoulders broad enough to carry many a heavy burden. "I'm not quite such a fool as that!" he answered. "Did you ever see a hungry dog give up a portion of his bones? No; these folks would simply send me packing, and withdraw all their influence."

"But, old friend, I haven't got the money—that's the simple truth."

"But you have credit, as the actor said at the Variétés."

"I have a little landed property, it's true."

"And isn't that money? You must sell it at once, for there will never be such a good time as this. Sell it, and you'll thank me for ever. Do a good action and a good stroke of business at one and the same time."

The lawyer demurred a little longer, but gently, like a man who is disposed to yield; and M. Verdale saw this, for his natural shrewdness had grown much sharper during the last few years of struggle. "Come now, my boy," said he, "lend me a helping hand and I'm saved!"

There was a rap at the door and a servant entered with a lamp. The lawyer gave his friend a cool, keen glance. "It's a great service, comrade, which you ask of me," he said.

"I know it very well."

"You have chances of success, I know, but still your calculations may not be realized."

"I know that too."

"And then these eight thousand francs would simply join the three or four thousand you already owe me!"

The architect started and colored. He trembled all the more, as he had believed the victory gained. "You are very hard on me," he stammered.

"Not at all—I simply wish to point out to you what the situation is, and to show you that if I decide to oblige you, I shall do so merely out of friendship."

"And I shall be eternally grateful to you," cried Verdale, enthusiastically.

However this enthusiasm did not seem to touch M. Roberjot very strongly.

"And I, too, my dear comrade," he coldly said, "I'm in need of service also."

"Well, if it's I who can help you—you may rely on me!"

"Take care—perhaps for the sake of obliging me you may be compelled to disoblige the persons you just named to me."

It was almost impossible to ascertain from the lawyer's tone whether he was in jest or in earnest. But Verdale at once replied: "I shouldn't hesitate a single moment—I should do what you desired."

"And yet you like these people?" remarked Roberjot.

"Yes, I like them, as a man likes the stairs that takes him to the woman he adores!" It was clear that the architect looked at things with eyes of the present day, and neither his convictions nor his principles would occasion much trouble. "Come, now, Roberjot," he exclaimed, "you have something on your mind—you distrust me?"

"No, certainly not!"

"Then out with it—how can I serve you? You have a grievance against one of the persons whom you call my friends?"

"Precisely."

Verdale's face darkened. "It's a great pity," he said, hesitatingly—"still I was your friend before I was theirs—so—so open your heart to me!"

M. Roberjot had only wished to test his friend, and it seemed to him that the result was not quite the thing. He was struck by the semi-reluctant tone in which Verdale had just spoken, and he asked himself if the architect hesitated before having the money what might he not do later on? M. Roberjot concluded that unrestrained generosity would be the best card to play; and so stifling a sigh: "My old comrade," he said, with apparently sincere emotion, "I'm not in the habit of being paid for the favours I do my friends—and in proof of it, I promise to give the sum you require within forty-eight hours, and without any condition whatever."

The lawyer's intuition proved correct—the architect was quite touched. "Show me at any time how I can serve you," said he, "and you may count on me. What am I to do—shall I quarrel with any of these men? Say so, and I'll do it instantly. With eight thousand francs the future is mine. Instead of being a government architect, I'll belong to the opposition. Now I call that a good idea!"

M. Roberjot smiled. "There you go!" he said; "just as you always do. Do you know what I was going to ask? Only for a little information respecting M. de Combelaïne."

Was the architect satisfied with this explanation? At all events he replied: "Information! Well, you shall have it in full and in detail."

At this moment a servant appeared to remind his master that dinner was on the table, and was growing cold. "I'll dine with you Roberjot!" cried Verdale; "and after dinner, over a bottle of your good Burgundy, I'll talk to your heart's content."

They took their seats at table; it was many years since Verdale had been so gay. He already felt the eight thousand francs in his pocket—and ambition, hope of success, with the juicy viands and generous wines, excited him to an unwonted degree. "Now, then," said he, when the dessert was served, "what do you want me to tell you about De Combelaïne? But how

can I talk of him without speaking of the Baroness d'Eljonsen? I must first say a few words of her. When I first knew this estimable lady it was in Rome, where I had been sent by our government. I was introduced at her house, and she did me the honor to take a fancy to me. If I had had any money, she would have borrowed it, but I had none, unfortunately for both of us. However, one day, after exacting from me an oath of eternal secrecy—an oath which I violate for you—she condescended to ask me to take some of her jewels to a pawnshop in the Eternal City. How old is she, you may ask? Upon my life I don't know—at least, not within twenty years. She may not be fifty—she may be over sixty. She is without her equal in ability to repair the ravages of Time. It was a secret she bought in London of some famous ensembler there. For half a century no one has ever seen her as God made her. She must sleep in her paint as some great generals sleep in their boots and spurs. People are ignorant of her real position in the world as of her years, but I know that she is deep in politics. This woman is in fact one of those cosmopolitan intrigantes who are ready to do such dirty work that it would appall an ordinary spy. How many persons has she betrayed in her time? How many has she bought and sold?"

"A cheerful portrait, upon my word!" muttered the lawyer.

For some reason or other this remark pleased the architect extremely. "I have a happy knack at description, you will admit," he said, with a loud laugh—and, emptying his glass, he continued: "All the world, friend Roberjot, would not speak as freely as I do. Madame d'Eljonsen has a good memory, and it is not a good thing to have her for an enemy. Those who know her best hold her in great fear."

"Nonsense!"

"No, not nonsense at all. It may be cowardly, it may be petty; but so it is. For fully forty years there has not been a handful of mud thrown anywhere in Europe without her having a finger in it. After all, I think such people have their merits. We know what to think of her and we don't always know what to think of our relations and friends. She knows any amount of things. She has several times forgotten herself in my presence and thought aloud. She knows the answers to a host of enigmas which history, despite all its spectacles and microscopes, will never be able to decipher. And this is why she will always hold her own. When she is hard up she draws some forgotten or hushed-up scandal from her bag, and addresses herself to the interested parties with the simple words: 'Buy, or I publish!' And they buy, of course. This dear baroness is the Muse of Blackmail. She sells a secret when she's in need as other people sell a jewel, and she swears that her resources are unexhaustible, and I am inclined to believe her—for she has served the Russian police as well as the Austrian, and there is not a man of any renown in Europe who has not been received in her drawing-room."

"No, no, not her *drawing-room*."

"Yes—my dear fellow—her drawing-room. You mustn't look on her as a vulgar intrigante. I will show you her portrait, painted when she was little more than twenty; and when you see it you will admit that a woman with such eyes like those is not likely to be fooled. In 1845 she kept a sort of boarding-house in London, and it is whispered that it was not altogether respectable. In 1822 she might have married a German prince who would have placed a coronet on her head."

"A romance," sniffed Roberjot disdainfully,

Verdale stopped short, with a displeased look. "Upon my word, my dear fellow, you really grieve me. How is it that you, as intelligent, as talented, in fact, as you are, can be so suspicious? You are like those persons who, on hearing a story, say, 'No, no, that's impossible, for nothing of the kind ever happened to my laundress!'"

"That may be—but all the same I want facts, and only facts!"

The architect frowned. "In other words, I weary you," said he.

"Very well; I'll content myself with answering. Now, question me."

However, this little spurt of temper had no effect on the lawyer—he calmly proceeded to ask questions, as had been suggested. "First, tell me precisely who Madame d'Eljonsen is?"

In the monotonous tone of a schoolboy reciting a lesson, Verdale replied: "French by birth—belonging to an old family in Brittany—noble and poor. Her father lived in a château—so dilapidated that even the rats had deserted it—about three leagues from Morlaix. Mademoiselle de la Roche-du-Hou was about twenty when she made the acquaintance of a very wealthy Swiss merchant, M. Eljonsen, whom business and ill-luck had brought to Morlaix. In three winks he asked her to marry him. The date of the marriage is not known precisely. However, she followed her husband, of course, and they lived at Riga—the centre of his commercial operations. Their union was by no means happy. M. Eljonsen seemed to be overwhelmed with grief at having married this beauty, and in less than a year he died, leaving his widow a fabulous fortune. It is not on the books that she wept, but she left Riga, where she was frightfully bored, and adding a 'd' and an apostrophe to her husband's name, with the title of baroness, she established herself at Vienna. She lived such a prodigal life there that in three years she was not only ruined, but she was pursued by her creditors, and threatened with several actions. She finally ran away and went to Switzerland, and thence to London, Munich, and Naples."

"But where does M. de Combelaïne come in?"

"I am getting to him," answered M. Verdale. "Now that you know the lady, I wish to say that wherever she went through Europe she took with her a boy named Victor, whom she seemed to adore."

"Her son, I presume."

"So people said—but they were mistaken. Madame d'Eljonsen cannot dissimulate—and if Victor had been her son, she would have said so. No, she simply announced that Victor had been entrusted to her care. By whom? Ah! that's the mystery. Some persons believe that his mother was a great lady—as they say on the stage—while others think she was a London girl of the middle classes."

"But what do you think?"

"I? oh! nothing."

"But still——"

"I know many things," said the architect, with a smile, "but I don't know everything. All that I can state with certainty is that this boy became the Combelaïne who seems to interest you so much."

Roberjot was no longer impatient. "And this name of Combelaïne—where did it come from?" he asked.

"Ah! that's another story, too. Madame d'Eljonsen, as I have said, is a very clever woman, but she is mortal like the rest of us. For very many years she had a weakness, and this weakness was called the Count de Combelaïne, who was a most excellent gentleman, but literally penniless. It was at Vienna that the baroness first met him, and after that they never

parted, at least as long as he lived. When young Victor was about to enter the world the count said to him, 'You have no name, take mine, it has been born by honest gentlemen and brave soldiers; so take it, and may it bring you good fortune.'

M. Roberjot made a gesture to impose silence on his friend, for a servant was entering with coffee and liqueurs; but as soon as the valet had retired, the lawyer said; "And now let us have the history of this lady's adopted son."

But the brief interruption seemed to have wrought a change in the architect's mind; his fluency seemed to have deserted him now that M. de Combelaïne was the person under discussion. "You cross-examine me as if I were a witness in a court of justice," he answered.

The lawyer tried to conceal his annoyance. "In other words—you now think it more prudent not to say any more."

"My dear fellow, this Victor de Combelaïne is a most dangerous fellow."

"Of whom you are afraid?"

Verdale shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, I am afraid of him, but only on your account, for I think you have some folly in your head. Look out what you do, for Combelaïne is not to be trifled with. You know he has killed five or six poor devils in as many duels."

"Why do men fight with such a fellow?"

"People fight with him, because while there are plenty of scandalous stories about him afloat, nothing is known with certainty."

Roberjot grew impatient again. "You promised me your assistance," he said; "if you wish to withdraw that promise, say so."

"I have no such desire. If I seem evasive, it is simply because I am endeavouring to find some means of being useful to you. But how can I hope to do so as long as you tell me nothing of your intentions, nor of what you are driving at?"

"It is not my secret," answered the lawyer.

The architect pricked up his ears. "Ah! there's a secret, is there? Then mystery and discretion. I will continue. This name of De Combelaïne, which is not the man's own, appears to be his only patrimony. I say appears to be, because there is really something else which justifies all the romantic legends of his birth. I allude to a certain mysterious protection which has been extended to him ever since he became a man. It obtained him a captaincy in the army which neither his means nor his conduct justified. Overwhelmed with debts, he was constantly doing things which would have caused the dismissal of any other officer in the service. However, he at last abused his privileges to such an extent, that one day he was compelled to send in his resignation, after swearing he would blow out his brains."

"In what year did that occur?"

"Upon my life I don't know. But it can be easily ascertained." Thereupon the architect laughed and continued: "I have nearly finished," he said. "For to follow De Combelaïne after he left the army would be as foolish as to try and follow a Will-o'-the-wisp."

"But how has he lived?"

"By his wits! Madame d'Eljonsen has come to his help several times—and during the last few years a woman, whose lover he is, has also greatly assisted him."

"Do you mean Flora Misri?"

"Precisely. It is said that she has lent him enormous sums with the security of a first mortgage on his lucky star."

The advocate thought for a moment. "And yet," said he, "this man nowadays has weight and influence. It is incredible!"

Verdale nodded. "I really don't see why you are so much astonished. Have you ever conspired, Roberjot? No—very well! However, if you ever do you will realize that such matters cause a man to make some odd acquaintances."

"I don't understand you."

"I simply mean that Prince Louis—our president of to-day, and our emperor to-morrow—has a very great many acquaintances." It was clear enough that the architect knew very well what he was talking about. "The president," he continued, "would perhaps now be glad if he did not possess so many good cousins. But a man can't conspire unhelped, and if he loses his memory his old acquaintances are apt to call on him and say, 'You remember me; I was at such a place with you.'"

M. Roberjot felt he had gained little by this desultory information—he had allowed himself to indulge in the insane hope that he might obtain from Verdale some startling revelation which could be utilized at once; but the result was very different. Perhaps the architect knew more. Indeed, no doubt, he did; but there seemed little or no prospect of loosening his tongue any further. However, the lawyer was not the man to break his word. "Come in to my private office," he said to Verdale, "and I'll give you what I promised."

The architect turned pale with joy. "Ah! you are a friend, like there are few in this world!" he cried.

And it was quite true—for Roberjot at once handed his friend the title deeds of the estate he meant to sell, at the same time giving him a letter to his notary, as he was far too busy to attend to the matter himself. Verdale was not displeased at this, but contemplated with respectful admiration the paper which represented a fortune. Up to this moment he had been tormented with doubts, hardly daring to believe in his own good luck; but now, without the least request for a security, he was presented with the eight thousand francs which would enable him to realize the millions he dreamt of. With a grateful impulse he grasped his friend's hand and cried: "I shall be a millionaire and you will be a deputy—*tu Marcellus eris*!"

XIV.

"Yes, I shall be a deputy," said M. Roberjot to himself. "It must be so, for it is really the only way I have of getting at De Combeldaine."

For the next few days he occupied himself about his election with feverish activity. He was more than once disgusted—as Verdale had prophesied—but he closed his eyes and thought of Madame Delorge. "For the time will surely come when she will realize her debt to me," he thought to himself.

When the success of his election seemed beyond doubt, he determined to avail himself of the permission she had given him to call on her at Passy. When he reached the villa he found the garden gate open, and in the open space before the house there were two lads taking a lesson in riding from an old man with a gray moustache. For a few moments the lawyer stood looking at the scene; but suddenly one of the lads saw him, and ran towards him saying: "Ah! Monsieur Roberjot, it's you!"

It was Raymond who spoke, and the lawyer shook hands with him, replying, "So you have not forgotten me, my little friend."

"I never forget my father's friends, sir," eagerly rejoined the boy, and beckoning to his comrade he called, "Come here, Léon, come and speak to this gentleman."

Léon complied. He was not as tall as young Delorge, but his shoulders were broader and he was altogether much stouter. He was a little awkward in his new clothes, but there was nothing underbred in his air or manner. "This is Léon Cornevin," said Raymond, "the eldest son of Laurent Cornevin, whom mamma spoke to you about. He has been here a week, and we are studying together. He is learning Latin at a day-school, as I am far ahead of him in that, but he works so hard that he'll soon catch up with me."

"I promised my mother," said Léon, "that I would do my best to profit of Madame Delorge's kindness."

"We shall always be together," interrupted Raymond, eagerly; "we shall be like brothers, and enter the Polytechnic School together."

"And when we are men," added Léon, in a tone of condensed hatred which was positively startling in a child so young—"when we are men we shall go in search of the cowards who murdered General Delorge and my father."

The lawyer was at a loss what reply to make, when he was relieved from his embarrassment by a carefully-dressed old gentleman who had just entered the garden, and who now advanced, saying with the most gracious air: "Monsieur Roberjot, if I am not mistaken?"

"Yes, sir."

"I would have wagered my life on it. I recognized you solely from the description which was given me of you. I myself, sir, am M. Ducoudray, an old and very devoted friend of General Delorge."

"I know you by name, sir."

"Ah! yes—Madame Delorge has, no doubt, spoken to you about me. She knows my devotion to her and hers. But you are tardy in calling on us, sir. We had become somewhat uneasy. Have the goodness to follow me; Madame Delorge will be delighted to see you. She is just now engaged with Madame Cornevin." And bidding the boys resume their lesson, he led the advocate, who was quite stunned by this flow of words, up the steps. At the top of them he stopped, and pointing to Léon, asked: "What do you think of that boy?"

"I think him a manly little fellow."

"Precisely; he is a lad of promise. With an intelligence far in advance of his age, he fully grasps the immensity of the misfortune which has fallen on him, as well as the extent of the goodness shown him by Madame Delorge. He already has an aim in life!" So saying, the worthy old gentleman sighed. "Ah, why isn't his brother like him?" he added.

"What brother?"

"Why, poor Cornevin's second son whom I have adopted to a certain extent."

M. Roberjot congratulated M. Ducoudray on his generosity, but the latter rejoined, "I am really not the one to praise. It is Madame Delorge. When she looks at you in a certain way she inspires you with ideas which otherwise you would never have. I could not keep Jean with me, however, as I am not married, and so I have placed him at college. He has been there for a week, and in that brief time I have twice received complaints from his teachers. He is not lacking in intelligence, quite the contrary;

but he is indolent, and at the same time mischievous. Not only won't he do anything himself, but he prevents the other pupils from studying. Yet he has a certain talent at drawing—enough at all events, to caricature his professors. He says that before his brother kills Combeldaine he intends to torture him. Ah! he's a nice lad and no mistake."

M. Roberjot was no longer listening to Ducoudray, but wondering at the strange association of these three children so different in temperament and disposition, and yet bound together by one thought and hope. Only a woman could have imbued these lads with such a spirit of revenge, and he recognized Madame Delorge's work.

"Come what may, however," continued M. Ducoudray, "I shall not abandon this boy, although the government scarcely relishes the protection I give him. The powers that be, will, no doubt, do all they dare to compel me to abandon him."

"Don't you somewhat exaggerate matters?" asked M. Roberjot, who was a little startled.

"By no means—I mean what I say. I have proofs of it. I have received letters which don't leave a shadow of a doubt. I am looked upon, and watched as a dangerous man—I am surrounded by spies."

"Oh no!"

"Yes, sir, such is the case. But I am on my guard, and all my preparations are made to start for a foreign land at the shortest possible notice. My trunk is packed, and I have a secret exit from my house, while round my waist I wear a belt full of money at this very moment."

The lawyer did not laugh, although Ducoudray's fears were really very ridiculous. His conduct since his alarm was so great, was all the more worthy of praise. For after all a man's courage is not to be measured by the actual peril he braves, but by the peril he thinks he braves. "However," continued Ducoudray in a feeling tone: "I find my reward in the friendship and confidence bestowed on me by my beloved friend's widow. But one word on this point—we must endeavour not to excite her too much. She is now in her husband's library with Madame Cornevin."

The two men entered the house as they spoke, and made their way to the apartment where the two women sat together side by side, like two friends, engaged in sorting various papers and letters. On seeing M. Roberjot, Madame Delorge rose and held out her hand.

"At last, sir," she said, "I can thank you in my own house for all your kindness to a poor woman who has no other claim to your attention than her misfortunes."

A man of heart and mind suffers intensely on receiving praises which he does not feel to be his due. "Alas!" stammered the lawyer, "I have done nothing, madame, to deserve your thanks," and thereupon he tried to turn the conversation, being eagerly assisted by Ducoudray, who was by no means pleased to hear Madame Delorge speak gratefully to any other man than himself.

"We have had some news," said Madame Delorge, in answer to the lawyer's inquiries. "At least we think we have had news of Laurent Cornevin. We feel certain, at all events, that he is living. Julie," she added, turning to the poor woman at her side, "tell these gentlemen what has happened. They must know everything so as to be able to advise us."

M. Roberjot looked at the groom's wife, and was astonished by her appearance of comparative refinement. Her grief and her daily intercourse with Madame Delorge had done much to raise her above her previous station.

He admired her superb black eyes, the dignified carriage of her head, and her heavy braids of chestnut hair.

As Madame Delorge spoke to her, a flush came to her brow, but she did not hesitate. "My parents," she said, "were very poor, and had a large family. At times they were so discouraged that they did not always act rightly. My father drank, and my mother—God forgive her!—did the same. But it is an awful thing for a woman not to have bread to put in her children's mouths. I don't wish to find fault with my parents; I'm only trying to excuse their children. I was one of four daughters, and the only one who had any chance of a good husband. The others, seeing that there were more blows than bread in the house, left it one after the other. Poor little sisters! they only changed one hard fate for another that was worse. They had shame to endure in addition to poverty. One of my sisters was named Adèle. She was the prettiest of us all; in fact, she was the prettiest girl I ever saw in my life, with her big blue eyes, her fresh lips, and fair hair, which was so long and so thick that the neighbours used to come and see it unbound. She went off with the son of a tenant in the same house—a quarrelsome, tipsy fellow, who had been a year in prison for stealing. I never expected to see her again, but one evening, four years later, I had gone with Laurent to the theatre, when suddenly he touched me on the elbow. 'Just look,' said he, 'at that girl in the corner of the stage.' I looked, as he told me, and I started. 'Why, I believe, it's my sister Adèle,' said I. This girl was playing the part of a water-nymph, and on referring to our programme we read the name of Flora Misri."

Somewhat surprised at the turn this narrative was taking, M. Ducoudray and M. Roberjot glanced significantly at one another. However, Madame Cornevin proceeded: "This name, Flora Misri, first threw us off the track. 'We are mistaken,' said my husband, 'it isn't your sister.' I dared not contradict him, because the change was so startling. When I had last seen Adèle she wore shoes down at heel, and a dingy calico dress, while this Water-Nymph had a most dazzling costume of satin and gold, with jewels in her hair, and shining boots. And yet the more I looked at her the more certain I felt that it was Adèle. 'What if it were,' at last said my husband impatiently; 'what would you do?' 'I should try to speak to her,' I replied. He remained silent for a moment, and then he said: 'We had better go out when the curtain falls again and ask the door-keeper something about her.'

"Well, this was no sooner said than done. We hastened as fast as possible to the stage door, where in a frightfully dirty little den, we saw an old woman who was drinking brandy with two or three *figurantes*. This woman looked at us with utter contempt, tossed her nose in the air, and haughtily asked, 'What do you want here?' My husband politely explained that he wished to know if Mademoiselle Flora Misri's real name was not Adèle Cochard, but the old woman rudely replied, 'How do I know? I should have work and no mistake, if I undertook to find out the real names of all these ladies!' whereupon she laughed at us scornfully, and the girls who were with her did the same. 'In that case,' said I, 'will you kindly tell us how we can get at Mademoiselle Misri?' However, she laughed even more than before, and asked where on earth we came from to imagine we could walk into a theatre like we might walk into a mill. Still, finally she condescended to say that we might wait outside until Mademoiselle Flora went away, or else we might write her a line which might be sent to her at once.

"My husband decided on the latter course, whereupon the *concierge* gave him a pencil, with which he wrote a note to the Water-Nymph, telling her that if she were really Adèle Cochard, and would have the kindness to look up at the amphitheatre she would there see her sister Julie. We then went back to our seats, Laurent being in a great state of indignation against the *concierge*, though I did not think much about her. The Water-Nymph soon appeared, and I felt certain that her first look was for us. I was not mistaken, for our eyes met and she wafted me a kiss. I was greatly agitated. To think of meeting in this fashion after four years' separation. I wondered how I should be able to speak to my sister, when, during the next *entr'acte*, a female attendant appeared and asked my husband if he were Laurent Cornevin. My husband said yes, and the woman thereupon gave him a letter. My husband wished to hand her a gratuity, but she went off saying, 'No, I am already paid.' I was quite touched at this attention on my sister's part. Laurent opened the letter, in which Adèle said she was dying to see us, but could not possibly come to us that evening. However, as the next day was Sunday, she wished us to come with the children to breakfast with her at eleven o'clock in the Rue de Douai.

"Laurent did not say much, but he rose the next morning as gay as a lark, and said he was going to have his beard trimmed in honour of the Water-Nymph. It was striking eleven when we reached the Rue de Douai with our three children. My sister resided on the second floor of a handsome new house. A woman with a familiar, saucy smile, opened the door, and received us as if we had been expected. She showed us into a room which struck me as the height of luxury, though Laurent did not think so. He had served in very great families, and he whispered that all that glittered was not gold, and that what he saw was not worth much. A moment later in sailed my sister in a superb dressing-gown, trimmed with lace. She was delighted to see us, and embraced us cordially. She was astonished at seeing my children. 'You have three already,' she exclaimed. 'Just think of it! and I never knew it!' However, I had not been with my sister for five minutes when I began to regret our meeting. She had only retained the bitterest memories of our youth. She complained, with extraordinary violence, of all our family, of our brothers and sisters in turn; of our father—whom she called 'the old drunkard'—and of our mother, whom she seemed to hate. My husband was as much displeased as I was at the tone she adopted, and I was beginning to feel very uncomfortable, when, suddenly, the servant came to say that breakfast was on the table.

"The dining-room seemed to me even more imposing than the drawing-room, for the furniture was in carved oak, and the sideboard was full of glass and china. Adèle, or Flora rather, had spared no expense, and either from a desire to dazzle us or from an honest wish to please, she had ordered a princely repast. The table groaned under the weight of good things, and beside each plate there were four or five glasses with a quantity of other things which I did not even know the use of. All this display troubled me. Besides, I saw my husband's face grow dark. My sister insisted on his drinking her wine, and, unfortunately, he obeyed her too well, for his eyes grew very bright and his cheeks very pale. 'Take care,' I said, in a low tone, but he paid no attention to my remonstrances, but went on drinking just the same.

"We had been at table for more than two hours when a new dish of meat was brought in under a silver cover. 'What, some more!' cried my husband; and then, examining my sister, he said: 'You must have a large for-

tune to spend money in this way.' 'Yes, I have money!' she answered, carelessly. 'You are well paid, then, at your theatre?' said he. She stared at him, and then laughed. 'I am paid just twenty francs a month, and I furnish my own costume.'

"An angry gesture came from my husband, and I really thought he was going to kick the table over. He looked at me and then at my sister. 'Mademoiselle Flora, you are a very shrewd woman,' he said. I tried to make my sister hold her tongue, but my words and signs were all in vain. 'I have been lucky, I admit,' she said, 'but I wasn't so at first. I had a notion when I ran away from home that larks would fall from the sky already roasted into my mouth. Fine larks they were! The man I followed was a perfect fiend, and we had not been together a fortnight before he beat me. Ah, if girls only knew! But I was stupid in those days, and the fellow frightened me out of my senses. When he had spent all the money he had at the wine shops he bade me get some more—the how was none of his business he said, with a sneer—if not he would beat me. You may say I could have left him. Very true; but where was I to go? I should, no doubt, be in his clutches to this day if he had not quarrelled with a man and drawn a knife, whereupon the police nabbed him. Fortunately the theatre wanted some pretty girls just at that time. I applied and was received, and since then I have nothing to complain of.' I quailed under the look which my husband here riveted on me. Had it been my life, his wife's that was being recorded, he could not have been more exasperated. 'As to my being shrewd,' continued Flora, who saw nothing whatever, 'I'm hardly that, for I may know how to get money, but I don't know how to keep it. If I were firmer I might have made some good investments; but I am too good-natured by far, and the result is that I am robbed and imposed upon.'

"She went on in this way with increasing bitterness, when suddenly the door opened, and a tall, thin man came in. His moustaches were well waxed, his hat was a little over one ear, and he had a cigar in his mouth. He did not say good morning, nor utter a civil word to any one, but he just looked at my sister, and then angrily exclaimed: 'What! not yet dressed! What on earth have you been doing all the morning?'—'You can see for yourself, Victor; I have been breakfasting with my relatives.' Never shall I forget the look with which he surveyed us. 'That may be all very nice,' said he, 'but, all the same, you ought to have been dressed. The carriage is waiting'—'Is it?' said my sister. 'Well, then, send it away. You bore me to death, Victor, with your tyranny!' But he interrupted her. 'What on earth do you mean?' he cried; and, raising her from her chair, despite her resistance and cries, he pushed her into the next room."

Madame Delorge and the two gentlemen were listening with that silent disgust with which one hears a record of disgraceful conduct. However, Madame Cornevin had only paused to draw a long breath, and she then proceeded speaking more rapidly than before: "I was horrified and ashamed, but before I could decide what to do or say, my youngest child woke up and began to cry. Laurent was as white as a sheet, and I really thought he would fly at this man's throat. My husband's strength was so prodigious that I dared not think what might happen if his rage got beyond his control. We could hear my sister's voice and her companion's in the next room, and we could even distinguish the insulting epithets they exchanged. Then came a crash of glass, a scuffle, and a shriek. 'Help! help!' cried my sister. 'This is too much!' said my husband, and he was about to rush into the next room, when I fell on my knees before him and implored him

to be quiet. 'You are right,' said Laurent; 'I won't interfere; the scene is too disgraceful. But come away—come instantly, and bring the children.' I obeyed without the least argument. Never had I heard my husband speak in such a voice before. When we got outside he pulled my arm through his and almost dragged me along. At last, when we reached a quiet place, he stopped, folded his arms, and looked at me. 'Well!' he said. I burst into tears. He shook his head sadly, and in a gentle voice exclaimed: 'I thank God every day that you are my wife. I love you and respect you—but from this day forth you must never set your foot in your sister's house. Do you hear?' I heard him, and promised to obey—while he, seeing how sorely I was hurt, said kindly: 'And now, what shall we do? It seems to me we had better finish the day in the country.'"

Here Madame Cornevin's voice broke as if with emotion, but she was determined to finish her narrative, and in a moment she had resumed as follows:—"I fully intended to keep my promise to my husband; but of course I could not foresee that my sister would come to me. However, she did come on the very next day, quite gay and smiling, arrayed in a gorgeous toilette, and with her pockets full of sweetmeats. As soon as she was seated she began to explain the scene of the day before. She averred that all lovers had similar freaks; that anger made men say a host of things which they were heartily ashamed of an hour later—things, too, which were not true. But she saw that I was not convinced by her arguments, and then she began to cry, and declared she was the most miserable of women. 'Why don't you leave him?' I exclaimed, indignantly. What was my surprise to hear her say that she did not dare to do so. She hated him, she despised him, and yet she clung to him. He seemed to have bewitched her. She unfolded all the terrible details of her existence, which was apparently so brilliant—and said more than once; 'With all your hard work and your poverty, your life is far happier than mine.' I was, of course, obliged to tell her that my husband had forbidden me to see her, and I supposed she would be very angry on hearing this; but no, she simply bowed her head, and said, sadly, 'He is right! I should do the same if I were in his place!'

"She came again and again, and when I told Laurent of it, he replied: 'I can't bid you put your sister out of doors, but ask her if she won't come in a less conspicuous dress.' She did this, and continued to call and see me whenever she had any special trouble, at times helping me with my work and talking with considerable frankness. She declared, too, that she respected my husband all the more for refusing to see her. Adèle—or Flora, rather—was not a bad girl then—nor is she bad now. She has a good heart, and she is tender and generous. Her first impulses are always good ones. But she is weak and fickle, and from one hour to another she will change all her ideas, projects, and wishes. The last person who speaks is always right with her.

"I was, therefore, not in the least astonished to see her change entirely in about a year's time. She adopted a most mysterious air, and spoke of grave events which were near at hand; 'I have become a very serious personage,' she said. 'I am interested in politics. She now never complained of this Victor, whom we had seen with her, but, on the contrary, she audibly blessed her stars that she had met him; 'For I shall insist' she added, 'on his getting your husband a lucrative position. Only yesterday I obtained through his influence a little tobacco shop for an old crone I knew. Of course I could do far more than that for my sister.' I was naturally quite dazzled and I told my husband what she said. He flew into a passion at the first

word, swearing that I bid fair to become as bad as my sister, whose boastings were all lies, and even if they were not, he was too proud to accept such patronage. I was unwise enough to repeat this to Flora, who was naturally much exasperated. 'I know many a man,' she said, 'who would be only too glad to accept Victor's protection, and lick his boots besides.' After this we grew cooler towards each other, my sister and I, and her visits became less frequent. I had not seen her for three months, when our misfortunes came—General Delorge was killed and my husband disappeared. I should never have dreamed, however, of applying to my sister but for the advice given me by Madame Delorge, for how could I have supposed that Victor and De Combelaine were one and the same person? I discovered this, however, for while watching for M. de Combelaine I saw this Victor, and recognised him."

"Madame Delorge thought this a very important circumstance; and according to her advice I went on Saturday evening to call on my sister. She does not now reside in the Rue de Douai, in the apartment which formerly struck me as so magnificent. She now has a much finer one on the Boulevard des Capucines. On entering the house I was instructed to go up the servants' stairs, and when I told a footman in livery that I wished to see Madame Flora Misri, he laughed in my face and said: 'Impossible! We have ten persons dining with us.' I insisted, but the man lost patience, and I believe he was about to push me out of the apartment when my sister crossed the passage. As soon as she saw me, she uttered a little shriek of surprise, and without noticing the servant's astonished look, she said: 'What has happened, dear?' I told her as briefly as possible of my great loss, but I took care to make no allusion to General Delorge. 'It's horrible,' she cried—'horrible! What will you do without your husband, with your five children to provide for? No, no,' she added, hastily, 'I won't bear this—my people shan't be meddled with. Wait a moment, I'll soon be back.' So saying, she disappeared. I heard a door open and shut, and then came a noise of voices in earnest discussion. Presently Flora came back to me with a beaming face. 'Keep up your courage,' she said; 'Victor will attend to that matter, and at another time prevent Laurent from meddling with what doesn't concern him! Come and see me to-morrow!'"

My heart leaped with joy, and it was with the greatest impatience that I waited for the next day, which, alas! had a bitter disappointment in store for me. When I went to see my sister I found her out of temper and embarrassed. 'My poor Julie,' she said, as I kissed her, 'I deceived you last night; not wilfully, but because I was deceived myself. No one knows what has become of your husband. The police have done their best to find some trace of him, but all to no avail.' She handed me some money as she spoke, but I rejected it with scorn, for it seemed to me as if it were the price of my husband's liberty or blood. And then I went away, feeling certain that I had nothing to hope for from my sister—but comforted all the same by a voice which seemed to tell me that my husband was not dead, and that I should yet see him again."

XV.

MADAME CORNEVIN had hardly finished her narrative when Madame Delorge looked at her two friends in turn, and asked: "What do you think of this?"

"I think," said the lawyer, "that Flora and De Combelaine were taken by surprise when Madame Cornevin first called on them. The next day, however, they had discussed the situation, and hence their final reply, from which I infer that Cornevin is not only alive but that they know where he is—"

"Precisely!" interrupted Madame Delorge.

"If he is living, he will be our witness," resumed the lawyer.

"And I'll find him!" exclaimed Ducoudray, starting to his feet. "It will be a new trade to me—that of a spy and detective—but I'm not ashamed of it. It is always honourable to serve a just cause, especially when success awaits one as surely as it does in this instance."

Madame Delorge thanked her friend, but her eyes were still fixed on M. Roberjot. "What shall we do?" she asked. The lawyer shook his head. "Wait—wait, that is all. Wait and hope."

Madame Delorge had foreseen this reply. "Well, I will wait" she answered. "My son and Léon have been talking to you, I believe. You have heard of their projects, and I will arm myself with patience."

When M. Roberjot withdrew, he was greatly disturbed in mind. "How on earth am I to make her love me!" he murmured. How? Only by avenging her husband. This conviction recalled him to a sense of his political duties, and also reminded him of his friend Verdale, whom he had not seen since the evening when he entrusted him with his title-deed. However, he was not astonished at the delay which had occurred, for it might have been caused by the desire to secure a more favourable moment for the sale. Still he was none the less pleased when on returning home he found a letter awaiting him, addressed in the handwriting of the unappreciated architect. But, to his consternation, the missive ran as follows:—

"Friend Roberjot—If, on receipt of this note, you see fit to have me arrested you can do, so I shall be condemned to five years imprisonment, or more. I have sold your estate, and I have appropriated its full value—not the sum you agreed to let me have, but the entire amount—one hundred and eighteen thousand nine hundred and thirty-one francs! I know what you will say—that it is a most scandalous abuse of confidence—but I could not help it. The most extraordinary opportunity presented itself of making from three to five hundred thousand francs within a fortnight, and I could not resist the temptation. And if you are good enough to keep quiet, I will bring you half the profits in fifteen days from now.

"VERDALE."

M. Roberjot sank on to a chair. "Ah! the wretch," he cried; "I'm ruined!"

However philosophical a man may be, or superior to sublunary concerns, he rarely accepts such a loss as this with perfect equanimity; and in this especial case circumstances made the misfortune particularly bitter. "He shall not escape me like this," muttered the lawyer; "he shall repent of his villany between four walls!" He rushed down the stairs as he spoke—nearly overturning his faithful servant, who had only just time to step aside as he asked with considerable timidity: "Will you be back to dinner, sir?"

As if that were a time to think of dinner—when he was hurrying to

make his complaint against this traitor in due form! Fortunately, or unfortunately, as will be shown later on, it was growing dark, and Roberjot was compelled to postpone his intentions by remembering that at this time of day he would find no one at the Palace of Justice.

After a moment's reflection he hailed a passing cab, jumped inside, and once seated, he began to read the letter again. He plainly detected between the lines the threat that if he made a row he might say good-bye to his money for good, while if he submitted there was at least the bare possibility that he might at some time or other see it again. In that case what should he do? Still in a woful state of indecision he drove to the office of his notary, who received him with a significant exclamation, "Well, how are you, you extravagant fellow!" he cried. "What do you intend to do with all the money you have turned your acres into?"

"Then my determination surprised you?"

"Of course it did—for I consider this a very bad time to sell. But your letter was so urgent——"

"Urgent?" repeated the lawyer, in bewilderment.

"Yes; and its urgent language, coupled with your friend's explanations, convinced me of the uselessness of any remonstrances. But it seems to me that you don't look over-pleased yourself. Are you sorry?"

"No, not at all—of course not;—but did you keep my letter? Please show it to me."

The notary looked somewhat surprised. "What do you want it for?" he asked.

That was precisely what Roberjot did not care to say. He knew that a full explanation at the present moment would commit him irretrievably, and so, in a careless tone, he answered: "Oh! never mind."

This was hardly satisfactory, but nevertheless the notary opened a drawer and took out a letter which he handed to his friend. The architect had certainly made a bold stroke, for he had altogether suppressed the original letter with which M. Roberjot had intrusted him and forged another in which he, Roberjot, gave his notary orders to immediately sell his property at any sacrifice, and hand the proceeds to M. Verdale. The reasons given by the architect to justify this precipitation were very plausible, and showed a thorough acquaintance with Roberjot's affairs.

"What has gone wrong, my boy?" said the notary. "You are as white as a sheet."

"It's nothing," said the advocate, with an effort, "only you must do me a favor. You must keep this letter as if it were a most precious jewel, for it is literally priceless to me!"

"Sleep in peace, my dear fellow; I will put it in my safe if you like!"

Enlightened as to Verdale's manner of operating, Roberjot had nothing more to do at his notary's, so he took his leave, and twenty minutes later he reached the lodging-house where the architect had resided for several years. The landlord, a stout, red-faced man, with a bald head, appeared in person to answer M. Roberjot's inquiries, to which he simply said, "M. Verdale is away on a journey."

The advocate was fully prepared for an answer of this kind. "When did he go?" he asked.

"He left at two o'clock."

"Will he be long away?"

The landlord looked at Roberjot earnestly. "Are you M. Verdale's friend?" he asked.

"Most certainly," replied the lawyer, in a tone of concentrated bitterness, "and a very dear and tried one."

"Then," said the landlord, "you are the very one whom M. Verdale mentioned, just as he was getting into the cab to drive to the station. He said you would come this very evening in a great rage to ask for him."

Although Roberjot was in no laughing mood, he could not refrain from smiling at this singular forecast on the architect's part. "Yes, I'm that friend," he said, "and I can assure you that I am in quite as much of a rage as he desired."

The landlord bowed profoundly. "Yes, he must have meant you, that's clear," he rejoined. "And, he said, 'Father Bonnet, tell this friend of mine not to be in a hurry, but to wait and see, and, above all, not to be anxious. Whatever happens, this day two weeks hence, I shall be at home again.'"

The landlord paused abruptly, being disconcerted by the advocate's eyes, which were obstinately riveted on him. "Why do you look at me in that way?" he asked.

"Simply because you are deceiving me."

"Oh! sir."

"I feel quite sure of what I say," continued the lawyer. "M. Verdale is not absent. M. Verdale is in this house."

The man lifted his hand as if to call Heaven to witness that he spoke the truth, and then, in a solemn tone, he replied: "M. Verdale left this afternoon—and I hope all my tenants will move away if I'm lying now. If you don't believe me, sir, I will take you to your friend's room—it is empty, and my wife has taken away the sheets."

This last detail went too far—when a man proves too much he proves nothing. This was evidently M. Roberjot's opinion, for he drew out his pocket-book. "Be kind enough, sir," he quietly said, "not to think me more of a simpleton than you are yourself. M. Verdale has changed his room—that is all. Show me where he is and this thousand-franc note shall be yours."

The man's eyes glittered with cupidity, and he stretched out his hand towards the money, but it was not yielded to his grasp. "I have told the truth," he said, sadly. "M. Verdale is away, but he will return in two weeks from to-day."

It was useless to argue further, but M. Roberjot went away thoroughly convinced that the architect was concealed somewhere within the four walls of that dingy hotel. He could easily satisfy himself on the point by filing his complaint and asking for a search warrant—but would that be prudent or wise? "I must be particularly cautious," he said, "with such a cunning fellow as that knave. The least false step will carry off the very small chance I now possess of getting a franc of my money back again." And as the clock struck nine just then he remembered that he was hungry, and regardless of the servant who was waiting for him, he went into the Restaurant Magny and ordered dinner.

The more he thought over the affair the more certain he became that M. Verdale was still in Paris—and consequently the more hopeful he felt. "If he stays here," he said to himself, "it is because he has told me the truth and has embarked in some great speculation, the result of which is still uncertain. I hope to Heaven he will succeed, for in that case he will bring my money back." All things considered, he decided that it was best to wait until the time fixed by the architect had expired. His complaint would be

equally forcible a fortnight later, and in the mean time he would not lose his only chance. "But if in two weeks from to-day, at high noon, there are no tidings of this noble friend, Verdale," he muttered, "at one o'clock precisely the police will be on his heels."

XVI.

WHILST M. Roberjot was thus cogitating anent his imperiled fortune, Madame Delorge, with the assistance of M. Ducoudray's experience, was occupied in attending to hers. At the moment of the first shock she had calmed herself with the hope of immediate vengeance, but she now realized her mistake.

She no longer believed, as the folks round about her said, and as it was the fashion to say, that the year would not elapse without another revolution which should sweep the president and his partisans from their position. But she was firmly persuaded that a government founded on such a crime as that of the 2nd of December must end disastrously, and that a day would come when its foundations undermined by the innocent blood shed on the Boulevard Montmartre, would give way entirely. The stronger her faith in the future, the more firmly did Madame Delorge feel the necessity of waiting—and thus she summoned strength to attend to those maternal duties, neglect of which often upsets the finest projects. By her husband's death she of course, no longer received his pay of ten thousand francs a year, and yet her expenses were increased. First, she had agreed to allow Madame Cornevin a pension of twelve hundred francs and she had promised to defray the expenses of the education of Cornevin's son, and intended to make this education as complete as possible. The charges in this respect, would of course, increase each year. In three years, moreover, masters would be required for her own daughter Pauline. She, not unnaturally decided to retain Krauss, who on his side had told her, in so many words, that he would never leave her, nor accept any wages from her, but would rather go in search of work to increase his mistress's income.

On the other hand what had Madame Delorge to depend upon. Eleven thousand francs per annum she supposed; but she was mistaken. Her friend, M. Ducoudray, true to his instincts and habits as a business man, took great pains to undeceive her, but eventually showed her clearly that her income could not be estimated at more than nine thousand francs; if it might occasionally turn out better, well and good; but she must not rely upon it.

It was in the general's study that the widow and her friend discussed these important questions, and it struck the worthy Ducoudray that he should never have a better opportunity for inserting a wedge in regard to his matrimonial hopes, which he had by no means abandoned. Accordingly in a somewhat trembling voice, for his heart beat as it did when he made his declaration to the first Madame Ducoudray—he began a long and somewhat complicated speech, which was designed to enlighten his dear friend's widow. "If she were quite right," said he, "in taking all needful measures for the future, she was equally wrong in making them binding and irrevocable. Human nature is changeable. Was she sure, could she be sure, that before eighteen months or a few years had elapsed, some event might not take place which would disturb all her calculations? Was she not still young? Solitude would not, perhaps, always prove as tempting as now. Her children would

grow up—three children—since Léon Cornevin might now be regarded as one of them—and she would need a man's hand to guide them."

Here the worthy old fellow's voice died away, for Madame Delorge was looking at him with so strange an expression that he felt frightened. "Are you speaking to me of the possibility of a second marriage?" she coldly asked.

He bowed, but dared not speak.

"If such an idea should ever enter my head," continued the widow, "I should repel it as if it were a crime."

Ducoudray turned a bright scarlet. "I hope to Heaven," he said, to himself, "that she had no notion I was thinking of myself!" For he had lived three months in such intimate companionship with Madame Delorge, who was superior to any woman he had previously met; he had grown accustomed to thinking of her, to acting for her, and obeying all her inspirations; and he shivered at the prospect of returning to his former lonely life in which his only amusement had been the chatter of his housekeeper.

However, Madame Delorge had no idea of the castles in the air which her old neighbour had built up, and attaching small importance to his words, she abruptly resumed, to his great delight, the discussion of her plans for the future. In the first place, ought she to remain where she was? Ought not this villa to be given up, dear as it was to her, and filled, with a thousand recollections of her husband? The rent was too heavy, and it required the care of too many servants. "I have given notice," she murmured, "because I knew I ought to do so. But where shall we go?"

The Château de Glorierès offered many advantages. There she could reside in comfort, reaping the many advantages of a land owner living on his estate. She could place Raymond and Léon at the College de Vendôme, which has a certain reputation, with the advantage of moderate charges. But this was one side of the question. To bury herself in the country would, in Madame Delorge's opinion, be to desert the field of warfare, and relinquish all hope of profiting by events. And so she said to herself, "I shall remain at Paris, cost what it will." And worthy Ducoudray was commissioned to find an apartment suited to her means, somewhere in the centre of Paris. A young servant girl of fifteen or sixteen, with old Krauss, would, she thought, be all she needed. Krauss she knew to be a good cook or a good nurse, in whatever capacity she might require him. It was with difficulty that M. Ducoudray refrained from offering to place every sou he had in the world at his friend's disposal. His heart was very soft and he grieved to see this woman whom he so adored crushed by such sordid cares! Still he dared not speak the word. The next day he started in search of an apartment, and after climbing hundreds of staircases, and facing as many janitors, he at last discovered, in the Rue Blanche, a suite of rooms which seemed to fulfil all one could reasonably expect for nine hundred francs per annum. It consisted of five apartments with a kitchen and a cellar, with a servant's room in the attic.

Madame Delorge went to see it, found it to her taste, and as it was vacant, agreed to take possession immediately. She at once began her preparations for moving, and, one afternoon, while she was in her *salon* packing some ornaments, Krauss entered, looking so pale and so frightened that she thought him the herald of some evil news. "What is it?" she cried.

The faithful servant could hardly speak. "One of the murderers of my dear general is in the hall," he gasped. "He wishes to see you, madame, and has sent in this card."

Madame Delorge looked at the card and saw that it bore the name of the Viscount de Maumussy. She turned very pale, as if she were about to faint. What could this man want? Still struggling for composure, she replied, "Show him in."

The old soldier went to obey her orders, while she darted to a door and called the two boys. They hastened to her, and she bade them enter the drawing-room and not lose one word of what would be said. They had no time to ask a question, for an instant later M. de Maumussy entered the *salon*, announced by Krauss. He was, as usual, carefully dressed in the latest style, gloved with a delicate shade of gray, with an eyeglass dangling across his coat, and holding in his right hand a slender cane—his air and manner offering a fashionable combination of English stiffness and French levity. He was as he had been for years; his beard admirably trimmed, his curly hair combed over his high wide forehead, his expression at once insolently benevolent, and patronizing, his eyes quick, and vivacious, and his lips curved into a mocking smile.

The spectral attitude of Madame Delorge, who stood pale and shadowy in her heavy mourning, with the two boys at her side, would have disconcerted any other man than M. de Maumussy. But he had not been named the "imperturbable" for nothing. As he crossed the threshold he bowed profoundly with that air of courtesy which was, his admirers said, "one of his greatest charms." "My visit," he began, "seems to astonish you somewhat, madame."

"Very much, sir," answered Madame Delorge, haughtily.

He bowed more profoundly than before, and advanced to the centre of the drawing-room. "You will excuse it, I trust," he continued, "when I have had the honour of explaining its motive."

"Speak, sir."

The viscount's eyes wandered from chair to chair with a look that clearly said: "Don't you intend to ask me to sit down?" And as Madame Delorge did not seem to understand these glances, he exclaimed: "My explanations will be a trifle long, madame."

"Ah! you will have the kindness to abridge them as much as possible, sir."

His first impulse, it was evident, was to take the chair which was not offered him, but he did not dare do so. Standing, therefore, and in an impassive voice, he continued: "You treat me as an enemy, and, although I am grieved, I am not surprised by it. I know the weight of the blow that has fallen upon you, for I well realised the value of Delorge, his intelligence and goodness of heart."

"And was that the reason you wished him murdered?"

The viscount did not wince. "You are mistaken, madame," he said; "the general fell in a duel, after an honest fight!"

"No one, sir, has a stronger interest than yourself in thus stating the case."

M. de Maumussy shook his head. "I am willing to admit to you, madame, that the explanations which have been furnished to you were false. There were reasons of State that necessitated them. Delorge was, in reality, the victim of a mistake. Had I controlled events, not a hair of his head would have been touched. But fate ordained otherwise. All that I was allowed to do I did. He was warned, and he had only to look out for himself. Had he pleased to be on the winning side, he could have done so."

"My husband was an honest man, sir."

"I know it, madame; and that is why I should be so glad to-day, were he living, to see him working with us, for I am certain he would be. He

was too intelligent not to recognise that the government which satisfied the greater number of interests would necessarily be the lawful one. But I am going too far; the disaster which occurred, resulted from an indiscretion of M. de Combelaïne——”

At this point M. de Maumussy hesitated; however, if he hoped for a word of encouragement he did not get it, for the widow and the two boys remained perfectly silent. At last he continued: “M. de Combelaïne, in spite of what I had said, fancied that General Delorge was with the *coup d'état*, and for this reason wrote to him, and made an appointment at the Elysée Palace. The general was punctual, and Combelaïne at once took him into a small drawing-room, where, without the least preamble, he foolishly proceeded to explain the plan of the movement which had been organized to save France. Delorge listened in silence, but when Combelaïne had finished, he exclaimed: ‘You are a villain, and I shall denounce you!’ As you may imagine, this proved a terrible blow for the count. He saw himself dishonoured, lost; he had also irretrievably compromised the success of the organization, and endangered not merely himself but also the prince president. Almost any man would have lost his head under similar circumstances. So he started forward and exclaimed: ‘No, you will not denounce me, for you shall not leave this place alive.’”

Madame Delorge gave vent to a stifled sob. “And he did not!” she sighed.

“No, he did not; but not by reason of any crime,” rejoined De Maumussy, eagerly. “Listen to me. It was at that very moment that I entered the little drawing-room. I grasped the situation at a glance, and I was appalled. I darted between the two adversaries, and I insisted on your husband listening to reason. I entreated him not to take advantage of the confidence that had so imprudently been placed in him. I told him if he would give us his word of honour to remain silent for forty-eight hours, we would ask no more. But he positively refused to do this. He had taken Combelaïne by the arm and shook him violently, declaring that, if he did not follow him to the garden at once, he would drag him there, after slapping his face in presence of all the people assembled in the reception rooms. De Combelaïne then did precisely what every man in the world would have done—he followed the general to the garden, and if the chances of the duel were in his favour, he is to be pitied, or cursed, if you will, but not accused of being a murderer.”

“Have you finished, sir?” asked Madame Delorge, coldly, as M. de Maumussy paused to draw breath.

“I have told you the exact truth, madame.”

“Then, sir, allow me to leave you. Come, my children.” She did not ring to have him shown out by a servant. She did worse—she retired herself so as to oblige him to withdraw.

However, just as she reached the door he exclaimed: “One word more, madame.”

She paused for a moment, showing perfectly well by her air and manner, that she would accept no explanations and listen to no arguments. “I am in a hurry,” she said.

The utter contempt of her tone would have wounded any man in the least degree sensitive; but the viscount was one of those persons who sacrifice themselves to the success of the enterprise they have on hand, declaring that a man is avenged by his success. So he restrained himself, and in a most friendly tone retorted: “General Delorge, madame, was a brave soldier, and has left many friends——”

The widow started.

"And these friends," resumed M. de Maumussy, "remembered him, that is to say, they remembered those who were dearest to him. The general was of poor parentage, and his generosity was proverbial in the army. He has left no fortune——"

"He has left an honoured name, sir, and a spotless sword."

A faint colour rose to De Maumussy's cheeks. He was growing impatient. "This woman is stupid with her Roman airs!" he thought to himself, and then he said aloud: "You are right, madame, but unfortunately in this corrupt nineteenth century, a heritage like that, no matter how glorious and enviable it may be, it is not quite enough. You are about to find yourself face to face with the trials of straightened circumstances."

"May I ask sir, what——"

"Excuse me, madame, it matters much to me, and I am anxious, not to repair, for that is impossible, but to soften as much as possible the grievous misfortune which it was not in my power to avert. I ventured to come here to-day so as to have, personally, the pleasure of telling you that your name is set down for a pension of six thousand francs——"

"I refuse it, sir," rejoined Madame Delorge.

"Permit me——"

"I refuse it absolutely."

Any other person than De Maumussy would have felt himself beaten and incapable of replying. Not he, however. "Have you the right to do so, madame?" he asked; "you are not alone—you have children—these two boys whom I see at your side. For them, if not for yourself, are you not very-hasty in taking a decision which you will repent of, perhaps, when it is too late?"

This was too much for Madame Delorge. "Enough, sir," she cried, in a trembling voice, "Enough! Do you imagine that I am so blind that I do not fully understand the shameful reasons for this last insult—the insult of your presence under my roof? Weak as I am, helpless as I seem, you are troubled by me—a shadow terrifies an assassin! In your eyes I am more than a remorse, I am a threat! This is why you were told, 'Offer her money—she will accept it, and hold her tongue; we shall then no longer be uneasy. If she should ever venture to open her lips we shall be able to reply, Why do you talk of your husband—haven't we paid you for him?'"

Positively there was more moderation than anger in the look which De Maumussy now gave Madame Delorge. He flattered himself on being somewhat of an artist, and never had he seen contempt and anger so magnificently expressed. "She is superb!" he thought.

Meanwhile, she proceeded in breathless haste: "We do not choose to be paid, sir. We don't choose to barter the chances which the future may have in store for us. We—my children and myself—intend to cherish our hatred and nurse our vengeance!"

An enigmatical smile flitted over De Maumussy's lips. Was it not natural that he should hold this poor widow's threats in derision.

"Yes, and we shall have our turn yet!" cried Léon Cornevin; "and later on, when I'm a man, and stand face to face with you, you will have cause to remember what I now say."

"I hope, Monsieur Delorge——" began the viscount.

"I am not the son of General Delorge," replied the boy with an angry gesture; "I am the son of Cornevin, the groom."

"And I, sir, am Raymond Delorge," said the other boy; "and I swear

to you that I intend to be a man before my time, so that I may the earlier avenge my father."

Was De Maumussy stirred by this hatred, and had he a presentiment of the future? Or did he think the threats and vehemence of these two children utterly unworthy of notice? No one could have told from the quiet tone in which he replied: "Thanks for your lesson, madame, it is a fortunate thing for me that there is no man here who shares your sentiments."

"You are mistaken, villain! for here is one!" cried a hoarse voice.

The vicomte hastily turned. On the threshold of the room stood Krauss, who was as pale as death, with a pistol in each hand. De Maumussy threw himself on one side with an exclamation. But Madame Delorge darted towards Krauss and caught him by the arm. "What are you going to do?" she exclaimed.

"Let me be, madame," he answered, with a threatening laugh; "it will be soon over. Ah! villain—after murdering my general, you come here to insult his wife!"

It was only with great difficulty that Madame Delorge succeeded in restraining the old trooper. "Go, sir," she cried to the viscount. "For Heaven's sake, go!"

He hesitated. Perhaps he feared that they might think him a coward, and he was brave—this quality must be granted to him—so brave indeed that his colour had not changed, although his life depended on an imperceptible movement of Krauss's finger. At last, however, he went slowly towards the door. "Adieu, madame," he said, as he crossed the threshold. "Now, whether you desire it or not, the amount of your pension will be paid to you!"

XVII.

MADAME DELORGE hardly heard this last sarcasm, which was the key-note to De Maumussy's character. She needed all her presence of mind to hold Krauss and prevent him from following the viscount. It was only with the greatest difficulty that she recalled him to reason. She finally sent for Ducoudray, and his solicitations had to be added to her solemn entreaties, and Raymond's remonstrances before the obstinate old trooper would give the solemn oath she asked—and swear to renounce his plans of too summary a justice.

"This has really been a terrible scene," said Ducoudray, as he drew the charges of both pistols, "and the consequences of it are something appalling."

On this score, however, Madame Delorge was by no means dismayed. The only thing which disturbed her was the pension threatened by De Maumussy. Was she to be exposed to the frightful humiliation of reading some morning in the *Moniteur*: "The Prince President, whose solicitude for the army is well known, has decided that a life pension of six thousand francs shall be paid from his private purse to the widow of General Pierre Delorge."

In that case what should she do? The matter so tormented her that she could not close her eyes all night—and the next day at nine o'clock she went to ask for M. Roberjot's advice. It was a Thursday, the very day, as it happened, when the term fixed by M. Verdale as the limit of his old friend's patience, was to expire. When the anxious woman arrived at the lawyer's residence, the servant said that his master had just gone out, but would return in a few minutes. Knowing the rooms, Madame Delorge was about to enter M. Roberjot's office, when the valet stopped her, saying: "Not there, madame,

not there—some one is already waiting for my master in there,” and thereupon he showed her into a small parlour—the one in which she had been received on the occasion of her first visit, and where she had heard the lawyer enunciate his political opinions.

But this time the door was open, and from the chair she took she could partially view the interior of M. Roberjot's office. The man who was waiting there did not seem to notice her entrance into the parlour. He was walking up and down in evident agitation, and from time to time giving utterance to such exclamations as these: “Where on earth can he have gone? He must have expected me.”

Suddenly, however, he stopped, for a door on the other side of the office had opened, and a moment later Madame Delorge saw this strange visitor dart to that part of the room which was beyond her range of vision. “Well! What did I say?” he exclaimed, “am I not a man of my word?”

Madame Delorge recognised her lawyer's voice as he replied: “It is as well that you kept it, for on the stroke of twelve I should have filed my complaint.”

He walked forward as he spoke to the centre of the room, where Madame Delorge could see him being followed by his visitor, whose attitude was very humble. With a vague presentiment that some grave explanation was impending, Madame Delorge tried to make her presence known by coughing and moving her chair. But they did not seem to hear her. The lawyer had taken a seat at his desk, while the other, who continued standing, earnestly exclaimed: “Do you know that you receive me like a dog who interferes in a game of ten-pins? You are not courteous. Haven't I kept my word? Suppose I hadn't come?”

“You would have been just what you are now—a dishonest man, Monsieur Verdale.”

The architect—for he it was—lightly shrugged his shoulders. “Come, now,” he replied, “can't you make up your mind to forgive me for the fright I have occasioned you?”

The lawyer's clenched hand came down with a furious bang on his desk. “Enough of these impudent jokes,” he said. “Let us have facts, not phrases.”

The architect's previous embarrassment and humility must have been feigned, for they in no way corresponded with the gay volubility of the words which now poured from his lips. “Listen to my confession,” he said. “I admit that my proceedings were—well, a little hasty. But I really had no choice—any one would have done as I did. Look at it yourself. On the very morrow of the day when you intrusted your papers to me, I was crossing the Place de la Bourse to go to your agent's, when I met Coutanceau. I stopped him, and said just as I always say to him: ‘Ah! Master Strongbox, when do you intend to make my fortune?’ I took it for granted that he would reply as he always did: ‘To-morrow, at half-past nine.’ But not at all; he looked at me and curtly replied, ‘Can you keep a secret?’ Considerably surprised, I answered, ‘Of course I can, if my fortune depends on my doing so.’ Whereupon he grasped me by a button and whispered: ‘Try to obtain a hundred thousand francs within four days from now. Bring this amount to me, and I assure you that there are ninety-nine chances to one that I can make half a million for you.’ I'm no chicken, Roberjot, but I assure you when I heard this I felt faint and ill. ‘Are you in earnest?’ I asked. ‘Most certainly!’ was his reply. And shrugging his shoulders, he added: ‘I'm willing to stake every franc I own on the chances.’ On hearing

this I was literally dazzled; my head swam. Five hundred thousand francs! What should I do?"

Madame Delorge heard every word of this strange confession, and considerably dismayed at being an involuntary confidante of a secret communication, she asked herself what she should do—if she had better show herself, or softly retire, telling the servant in the hall that she would return later on. However, M. Verdale proceeded: "It was then, friend Roberjot, that the thought came to me of borrowing the title deed which you had intrusted to me without asking your consent. I was horror-struck at my own audacity—I realized all I risked; I thought of the convict's cell to which I might be consigned, and the thought was not an agreeable one. But if the chances were in my favor, what then? I might go to bed poor and wake up wealthy and—this was a most powerful temptation. I am no angel, and I yielded. A voice crying out to me that I should succeed inspired me with extraordinary courage. I went home and tried to imitate your writing exactly, and indeed with very little trouble I composed and wrote a letter in which you ordered your agent to sell the estate and pay the proceeds over to your good friend, Verdale. I thought the imitation perfect, but, of course, I could not tell how it would strike the agent. I was dreadfully nervous while he read it. He accepted it, however, without question, and the very next day handed me one hundred and eighty thousand beautiful francs, which I carried at once to Coutanceau."

Madame Delorge, who had risen to depart, sank into her chair again.

"The wine was drawn, you see," continued the architect, "and good or bad, it must be swallowed. I knew I ought to see you at once—but I asked myself how you would take it. Should I throw myself at your feet and beg your pardon? I really thought of doing so for a moment. It would have been a stupid thing, however. I examined the situation in all its aspects, and the result of my meditations was the letter I wrote to you—a letter which was really a masterpiece—as it compelled you to silence if you wished to regain any portion of your money. I gave explicit instructions to my landlord, knowing that you could go to him for information. You were shrewd enough to grasp the truth. I was in my rooms, as you suspected, but you could not buy my landlord as you tried to do. I shut myself up for two weeks, and suffered all the tortures of a man condemned to death, but in hope of being reprieved. Look at me and see if I am not ten years older! You, without knowing it, risked your fortune, while I, you see, risked my skin. I intended, if the speculation was a failure, to blow out my brains!"

He assumed a tragic air and position as he uttered these last words, vainly hoping to touch his friend's heart. "All these explanations are utterly useless," said M. Roberjot.

The architect folded his arms and stepped back. "Don't you understand?" he asked.

"Understand what?"

"That my presence here announces success!" And then, in a tone of triumph, he continued: "For I have succeeded fully and entirely—far beyond my wildest hopes. I have made my fortune and yours. This very morning, not two hours ago, Coutanceau's cashier paid me four hundred and eighty thousand francs. From this sum, of course, there is the amount of your involuntary loan to be deducted; but the rest we will divide like brothers. We are rich, my boy, rich! Will you pardon me now? Admit my wisdom and greatness. Throw aside your solemn air and shake hands with me, old friend."

But the lawyer did not seem disposed to do so. "You are wrong, Monsieur Verdale," he said.

The architect feared that he was not understood. "He does not believe me!" he cried. "Wait a moment, St. Thomas—wait, if you please." And making a dash at his portfolio, which he had deposited on a chair, he drew from it an enormous pile of bank-notes, and spread them out on the desk. "Feel them," he cried; "look at them, lay your hands on them! It is all ours! Victory! Long live Coutanceau!"

But the words of triumph died away on his lips when he saw the disgusted gesture with which the lawyer pushed aside the money, and he was quite aghast when Roberjot replied: "Count out the amount you owe me, if you please, and take the rest away."

"You are jesting, surely," said the architect.

"I never spoke more seriously," was the reply.

"Don't you understand me, my boy—don't you realize that I wish to share my profits with you——"

The lawyer angrily interrupted the speaker: "Your persistence, sir, is an insult."

The architect's face flushed. "Roberjot, you are hard—very hard. I have been guilty of a very great—imprudence; but it seems to me that when I repair——"

The lawyer laughed. "How can you repair what you have done, except by making me an accomplice of a forgery? That will do. Pay me what you owe me and let us have done with each other. We will not discuss the matter—since we should never understand each other."

This was quite true, for the architect was utterly bewildered. He counted out a hundred and eighty thousand francs, and laid that amount in notes before M. Roberjot. "Here is the money," he said.

"Very well," was the reply.

M. Verdale shrugged his shoulders. "If you intend to take this tone," he said, "I have to ask that you will return the letter I wrote you."

But Monsieur Roberjot started up. "No!" he exclaimed, in a firm tone; "that letter is mine, and you shall never have it. I shall keep it!"

Trembling like a leaf, Madame Delorge looked and listened, almost forgetting the peculiarity of her position. Overwhelmed by this unexpected refusal, the architect literally swayed like a drunken man, and looked at his friend with haggard eyes for a moment or two in silence. Then he murmured: "You wish to frighten me, Roberjot, do you not? You wish to avenge yourself for the suspense I have kept you in? Admit it. It is impossible that you really intend to retain that letter."

"It is quite possible."

"But why?—for what end?"

"Because——"

"Do you intend to file a complaint, although I have returned you your money?"

"You know that I do not."

"What do you wish to do, then?"

"I have no explanations to make."

"Roberjot!"

The two men stood face to face—the lawyer cool and self-possessed, the other trembling nervously. "You must see," continued Verdale, "that it is quite impossible for me to leave my letter in your possession. It is too compromising for me."

"It ought never to have been written."

A silence ensued—so profound that Madame Delorge could hear the architect's laboured breathing. "To allow this devilish letter to remain in your hands is to give you the power that God alone possesses over mankind. It is to abandon my honour, my future, and my life to you; and also the life, honour, and future of my son. It is to give myself up to you bound hand and foot, to acknowledge myself your slave, your dog—your thing."

The lawyer did not answer.

"To leave this letter with you," continued his companion, "would be to relinquish hope, happiness, and repose for ever. To-day I am rich, to-morrow I shall be a millionaire; and within a year I shall be a man of influence. But a persistent voice will breathe in my ear the words, 'All you have gained—fortune, honour, and consideration, are at the mercy of this man. He has only to speak, and the edifice you have built with such pains will crumble to dust. To-morrow, we shall be arrayed against one another as enemies, for to-morrow the empire will be declared. You will be its determined adversary, and I its obstinate defender? What will happen? Will you come to me with this letter in your hand, and say to me: 'I forbid you to entertain such and such opinions?' or will you say, 'I command you to betray those whom you serve, and who believe in you——'"

With a quick jesture Roberjot interrupted him. "Do you realise," he asked, "that you are insulting me?"

The architect smiled grimly. "Will you tell me," he cried, "what you wish to do with this letter?"

"I keep it because I know what you are capable of. Your ambition is boundless, and nothing holds you in check; the recollection of this letter may possibly do so. You may recall it some time when you are about to attempt a similar transaction, and be restrained by it."

"Indeed! And what part do you suppose I am to play in the future? At this same time yesterday I hadn't a sou in the world."

"Be at ease; the letter will not leave my drawer."

The architect started forward so impetuously that Madame Delorge thought he was about to strike the lawyer. But no, he checked himself and said, quietly. "And this is your final decision?"

"Yes."

"And you wish me to leave you thus?"

Roberjot did not speak.

"Farewell," said M. Verdale, and taking up his hat and portfolio he walked towards the door, beyond Madame Delorge's range of view. Suddenly, however, he came back as if inspired by a new hope, and said, in a supplicating voice: "What can I do to get this letter? Shall I give twenty thousand francs to the poor—or twice that sum? Shall I found an hospital or a school? Speak!"

"I have nothing to say."

The architect tore his hair. "My friend, my school companion! shall I humiliate myself before you? Do you realize what it costs me?" Tears stood in his eyes as he spoke. "I admit my error—I confess it, and ask your pardon. In the name of your mother give me that letter."

The lawyer was moved, and Madame Delorge saw that he was inclined to yield, although he repeated his refusal. But the architect could no longer control himself. He leaped at the lawyer and seized him by the throat, crying: "The letter! give me the letter!—where is it? Answer me at once—or by the God that made me, you are a dead man!"

Fortunately Roberjot had not lost his self-possession. He shook off his adversary and rushed into the parlour, where the general's widow stood in dismay.

"Wretch!" cried the architect, "you shall not escape me!" And seizing a poniard which served as a paper-knife, he darted after the lawyer. But he found himself face to face with Madame Delorge. His terror was so great that he stood transfixed, shaking from head to foot. At the same moment, the servant who had heard the noise, hurried into the room. The architect looked wildly around him, and, throwing down his dagger, cried: "I'm lost! I'm lost!" and then fled like a madman.

The servant hastened to the assistance of his master, who had fallen on to a chair. So furious had been Verdale's grasp that the lawyer was fairly choking, and it was some time before he recovered complete consciousness. His first thought and look were then for Madame Delorge who, pale with emotion, stood close by his side. "Your courage has saved my life, madame," he said, and with his foot he pushed aside the weapon dropped by the architect.

"I will summon the police!" exclaimed the servant, but his master instantly forbade him to take any such step. "Moreover," he said, "if you wish to please me, you will not breathe a word of what has happened to any human being."

"But if that man comes back again," urged the servant.

"He will not come back again, you need not be disturbed," said the lawyer, with a faint smile. "He will send, however, for he has left behind him all that he holds most dear." And, so saying, he showed Madame Delorge the portfolio stuffed full of bank-notes. "Poor Verdale," he resumed, "as soon as he is himself again he will be terribly anxious."

But Madame Delorge did not smile. "Have you not been a little hard, sir—a little pitiless?"

"I! can you ask me such a question?"

"I most involuntarily heard the whole conversation, and I am sorry for the poor man. He has unquestionably been very guilty—but he repents."

"You don't know him!" interrupted the lawyer. "He will do the same thing to-morrow under similar circumstances. You thought him desperate. He was only angry at finding himself in my power—for I hold him with a firm grasp. These are the rascals who blackmail honest men. But this time the case will be reversed; for an honest man will blackmail a rascal in the interests of justice."

Madame Delorge shook her head. "No matter," she said; "the wisest course would have been to return the letter to him."

"And to let him do the same thing again?" asked the lawyer. "No, no," he continued, "it is with this pretty system that honest men are perpetually deceived; it will continue to be so until they make up their minds to punish the criminals themselves whenever they catch them in the act. I begin to feel sorry that I did not have Verdale arrested; it was a miserable weakness that restrained me. I was afraid of losing my money. I had a vague hope that if I waited patiently, I should get it again. You have no comprehension of that fellow. He has found his path easy to tread, and he will mount rapidly now. Before ten years have elapsed I expect to see him on the topmost rung of the social ladder—minister of public works, perhaps—and pocketing millions. He will hate me like death, and I ought to hold on to his letter, if only from motives of ordinary prudence."

But Madame Delorge did not seem convinced; and Roberjot added, after

a brief silence: "My strongest reason for resisting this rascal's entreaties was on your account. Verdale is the friend of your enemies, and—I am willing to wager my life—he has been the lover of the Baroness d'Eljensen, and is still the confidant of Coutanceau and De Combelaine."

Madame Delorge colored, and was about to speak, when a ring at the bell resounded through the house.

"Can that be Verdale back again?" muttered the lawyer.

But at that moment his servant came in with a card, saying that a gentleman wished to see him for a moment on urgent business. M. Roberjot read the card aloud: "Dr. Buiron, President of the Sanitary Commission for the City of Paris."

"Dr. Buiron!" cried Madame Delorge. "He is the man who first gave me the idea that my husband had been assassinated, and then contradicted it."

"And you see, madame, that this contradiction has won him an official post." The lawyer then addressing his servant, said: "Show the gentleman into my study." He entered it himself, but left the door so that Madame Delorge could both see and hear the doctor. He had not changed, save that his stiffness and importance was increased. He bowed gravely, and in a pompous tone, began: "I am Monsieur Verdale's friend."

M. Roberjot's lips parted to say, "I am very sorry for you," but he restrained himself and uttered a simple—"ah!"

"He has sent me," continued the physician, "to ask you for a portfolio he left here by accident."

"And which contains a large sum of money?"

"Precisely, three hundred and sixty-two thousand francs in bank-notes and securities."

The doctor must have had a good conscience not to quiver—and he did not—under the look which the lawyer gave him, as he replied, "I am ready to hand you this portfolio and the money it contains, but I must have a receipt from you in return."

The doctor bowed acquiescence, and after verifying the contents of the portfolio, he gave a receipt in due form, and went off.

"There goes another no better than the first," said the lawyer, returning to Madame Delorge, who received him with great reserve and no little embarrassment. She had begun to realize the extent of M. Roberjot's interest in her, and so it was with great haste that she laid the object of her visit before him, and told him of the pension with which she had been threatened. But the lawyer could discover no way in which she could avoid this crowning insult.

"There is but one means," he said, "and that is doubtful. My election is almost certain. I can threaten Monsieur de Maumussy that if he persists I will inform the Chamber of the whole matter. But even then would any good come of it?"

Madame Delorge felt greatly discouraged when she left M. Roberjot. "And this," she said, "is the only man who can aid me. He is honorable and thoroughly good. And yet I cannot go to him, for I clearly see that he loves me."

XVIII.

HOWEVER, the widow's energy was too great to be daunted by any unforeseen obstacle. "I must learn to do without Monsieur Roberjot's assistance," she said to herself; "but my husband's murder will be none the less surely avenged."

This was now her dominant idea. She well knew that when the mind is always on the stretch, directed toward one end, its natural strength is quadrupled, and the weakest are gifted with a giant's strength. "We shall be compelled to wait for years!" Ducoudray had said to her. "I could wait for centuries," had been Madame Delorge's reply.

Her first care in moving from Passy to her new home, had been to arrange the general's study just as it had been at the villa. Furniture, hangings, curtains, all were the same, and to see the open desk, the cards, and half-finished letter, just as the general had left them, one would have thought him on the point of returning. One thing alone was different, and this was a matter that astonished the poor woman's few visitors. Across the general's portrait hung a sword, the one he had worn on the night of his death. It hung just as it had been brought to her, in its mud bespattered scabbard, sealed as it had been by the commissary of police at Passy. Not a day passed but what Madame Delorge showed it to her son, saying that it would be his right some day to break that seal, and that there hung the weapon he must use to avenge his father's murder. At each meal, whether there were guests or not, the general's chair was placed at the table, and his place set. At first M. Ducoudray's appetite had been taken away by what he considered a very lugubrious proceeding, but he had at last grown accustomed to the empty chair, which he said to himself was like an empty grave between himself and the widow.

Apart from these details never was a sorrow so unostentatiously displayed. The people residing in the same house, realized as they saw the widow looking so pale and cold, and surrounded by her children, that some great grief had befallen her; but they knew nothing of her story. They could elicit nothing from the faithful attendant Krauss, and the servant girl had been recently engaged, and could have told nothing even if she had been so inclined.

Madame Delorge had, moreover, adopted a style of life, the simplicity and economy of which were apparent to all lookers on—and they found little to gratify their curiosity. She rose early, and with her young servant put the rooms in order and prepared breakfast. Later in the day she took her seat near the general's desk and mended linen and clothes, whilst superintending the studies of her children. Twice a day Krauss escorted the two boys to school and home again. They were rarely heard in the house—and indeed their application to their studies was so great that Madame Delorge was frequently obliged to speak peremptorily to tear them from their books. Sunday alone changed the peaceful routine of their life, for Jean Cornevin—M. Ducoudray's adopted son—then came to pass the day with them; and, if the weather was fine, the old gentleman took the three boys into the country. He had grown accustomed to Jean's turbulence, of which he had once complained to M. Roberjot, and he now talked a great deal of the lad's vivacity and cleverness, of his skill with his pencil, and so on, declaring that the day would come when the boy would make his mark in the world as an artist. Sometimes Ducoudray induced Madame Delorge to be of the party; and then,

as the restaurants in the neighbourhood of Paris are beyond narrow purses, Krauss followed them, carrying a large basket full of provisions which they partook of seated on the grass.

Worthy M. Ducoudray had given his friend's widow one of those proofs of affection which are worth volumes of protestations. He had moved. For her sake he had abandoned Passy. He, the selfish egotist, had given up his pretty villa, the house which he had built to suit himself, his tastes and habits, and where everything which could render life easy and agreeable was to be found. One fine morning, without giving a hint of his intentions to anyone, he had established himself on the third floor of a house in the Rue Chaptal. He was by no means as comfortable as at Passy. But he lived only a few yards from Madame Delorge, and could pay her two visits every day. Without him the widow would certainly have felt inexpressibly lonely. All her husband's friends had been scattered by the *coup d'état*, exiled, reduced to flight, or living in the country. Of all the people she had been in the habit of seeing, she now only met two or three at rare intervals.

M. Roberjot came occasionally. Despite her wish to show him her gratitude for his kindness, she had received him in a way to make him understand that the hope he cherished could never be realized. On a par with M. Ducoudray, Madame Delorge's most frequent companion, was Madame Cornevin. By the advice of her benefactress, the groom's wife had left Montmartre and established herself in the Rue Pigale with her three daughters, Clarisse, Eulalie, and Louise. Her rent, of course, was very much larger than before. She paid four hundred francs per annum, which seemed enormous to her; but Madame Delorge had traced out a plan which rendered this expenditure indispensable. Madame Cornevin had been a very skilful seamstress before her marriage, and since her husband's disappearance she had placed herself under a fashionable dressmaker. There she recalled her previous skill, learned certain details of the trade, and obtained an idea of the fashions. "And when you are sure of yourself," said Madame Delorge, "you will take work to do at home, and your three daughters will sew with you. Monsieur Ducoudray and myself will find customers for you, and when your husband comes back his surprise will be great to find his wife at the head of a large establishment."

M. Ducoudray approved of this plan, and devoted considerable time and no small amount of money to searching for the lost man, who was the only witness of the death of General Delorge. A most difficult task it was—more difficult and more perilous than he had imagined. To hunt up a person whom you have no trace of is difficult enough when you can act openly, use the newspapers and the subtle army of European police. What must it be, then, when you have to act alone, when you are obliged to shroud each step in mystery, and act in deadly fear of the Rue de Jerusalem! And this was precisely Ducoudray's position—and yet he had one great chance. Cornevin—admitting that he lived, and nothing proved this better than the behaviour of Flora Misri—must be imprisoned somewhere; for if he were free he would of course, hasten to his wife and children, whom he adored, and whom he must imagine had been reduced to frightful misery. It was clear, too, that he must be most carefully guarded, as otherwise he would have given signs of life by means of a letter, a note, or a word.

M. Ducoudray had his agents at work, half a dozen of those fellows whom the police are obliged to dismiss from time to time, and who afterwards resort to the "private inquiry" business. Each week the worthy man drew several bank notes from his pocket merely to hear the words, "We are on the

track." Then he would rub his hands, without remembering how many times he had laughed at this old phrase. These proceedings were the habitual subject of his conversation with Madame Delorge, except when Madame Cornevin was present—for it was considered advisable that the poor woman should not be kept in suspense by hearing of the various measures taken to find her husband. It would have only meant keeping her wound for ever open.

Madame Cornevin, on her side, however, was also at work. Hard as it was for her, she had gone to see her sister again, and implored her to use her influence with M. de Combelaine. But at the first words Flora Misri had flown into a violent rage. "I admit," she said, "that Victor is all powerful. He has obtained a tobacco shop for my mother, and a place for my father, where he has nothing to do. But Victor would be very stupid to serve people who only wish to injure him. What are you doing this very day? You are spending your whole time with the wife of that general whom Victor killed in a duel—a mad woman, who would set the world on fire for the sake of injuring us! What are you two plotting, with the aid of that old fellow who never leaves you? Do you think we know **no** thing of your performances?"

This interview, on being reported to Madame Delorge, gave her a great deal to think of, "De Combelaine and Madame Misri have penetrated your secret," she said to her old friend Ducoudray; "they have heard of your investigations."

"It is impossible," he said, "for I have never opened my lips to a human being." He determined, however, to take counsel of M. Roberjot.

"You are deceived," said the lawyer, instantly. "The men whom you are paying are employed by De Combelaine also. Spies who don't work for both sides would not be spies. Remember what I say."

The good man was thunderstruck, but convinced. "I will dismiss them this very evening!" he cried, going off in high dudgeon at the thought he had been so fooled.

Nothing annoyed M. Roberjot more than these awkward attempts on Ducoudray's part, for he, too, was trying to find Laurent Cornevin. The fact that he was a member of the opposition had placed him in relation with a large number of voluntary exiles, and with many who were proscribed. He had interested them in the fate of the poor groom, by explaining to them the importance of his testimony, and he had strong hopes of ascertaining what he wanted to know through them.

Meantime, however, the government, which so many prophets had declared would collapse before the end of the month, seemed to be stronger than ever. The newspapers were curbed and silent, so were the deputies; not a discordant voice had troubled the flow of blessings and flattery poured upon the prince-president. His journey through the departments, arranged by an able manager, proved one long ovation, and on returning to Paris, he walked under a triumphal arch, while a fashionable barber displayed a transparency with the inscription, "*Ave Cesar.*" Soon indeed the Senate hailed the prince as emperor, and a *plebiscite* consecrated the empire.

The reign of Napoleon III. began. He formed a court after the model of his uncle's. Courtiers eager for places, crowded around him. M. de Combelaine received a post of responsibility; De Maumussy scattered money to the winds, Madame d'Eljonsen rented a palace while waiting to build; M. Verdale became one of the official architects, and Dr. Buiron one of the physicians attached to the court.

"Where will they stop!" cried M. Ducoudray in dismay.

But Madame Delorge was very calm.

"The higher they climb," she answered, "the greater their fall will be. God is just. Patience!"

But, recognized by all the powers of Europe, called "cousin and brother" by the King of Prussia and "good friend" by the Emperor of Russia, Louis Napoleon had reason to believe that the throne of December was strongly built, and that he might dream in peace of founding a dynasty. One morning, in January, 1853, M. Ducoudray appeared rather earlier than usual in Madame Delorge's drawing-room with a newspaper in his hand. "Well!" he cried, "it is all settled; we are to have a superb wedding! The emperor is to be married." It was true, for at this same hour all Paris was discussing the manifesto which Louis Napoleon had issued, and which began: "I yield to the wish so often manifested by my country, and announce my marriage——"

"And whom does he marry?" asked Madame Delorge.

"A young Spaniard," was the reply, "Mademoiselle Eugénie de Montijo, Comtesse de Téba."

Mademoiselle de Montijo was not unknown to the Parisians, for during the presidency the attention of the *habitués* of the opera had often been turned to a box, in which sat a woman of mature age and ungracious countenance, and a young girl who, despite the smallest of eyes, was none the less exceedingly beautiful. The two ladies were the Countess de Montijo and her daughter. It was very soon noticed that their names always figured on the list of guests at all the presidential *fêtes*, either at Compiègne or at Fontainebleau. The chroniclers of the court never ceased to sing the merits and graces of the young Spaniard, lauding the abundance of her fair hair and the whiteness of her complexion. Considerable anxiety was felt, if not expressed respecting the queen of the presidential *fêtes*, and at last public curiosity was excited to such a degree that crowds gathered before any shop she was known to be in, and to escape notice she gave up attending the opera. Her position at court was uncertain enough, however, for many people, including those who had every reason to wish to penetrate their master's secrets, to believe that amorganatic marriage had been contracted between herself and the emperor. The official announcement of the wedding, accordingly amazed the Parisians, and, notwithstanding the many excellent reasons alleged in the manifesto, the news was coldly received.

Many people regarded the marriage as so extraordinary that they explained it as an act of pique on the emperor's part. They related how Louis Napoleon, in search of a wife, had sent ambassadors to Germany—that inexhaustible nursery for marriageable princesses—where several powers had been applied to, but not one found willing to accept his overtures. It was said that he had in vain asked for the hand of the daughter of Prince Wasa, son of Charles XIII. of Sweden, and that a princess of Hohenzollern had also been refused him.

"This may all be true," said M. Ducoudray; "but all the same, I don't see why an emperor can't, like any simple citizen, marry the woman he likes best."

This opinion, reasonable as it may seem, was by no means that of the emperor's family. There were rumours of violent scenes, and it was said the Princess Mathilde had thrown herself at her cousin's feet imploring him, in the name of the most sacred interests of his family, not to contract such an alliance. However, this repugnance and these objections, if they really

existed, did not prevent the Princess Mathilde from carrying the bride's train, when the wedding day came.

Paris was much excited over the bride's *trousseau*. A certain lace dress caused an immense amount of gossip—and the Dangeaus of the new *régime* sighed that there was not time to modify the somewhat superannuated setting of the crown diamonds. The city of Paris voted six hundred thousand francs for the presentation of a necklace to the new empress, but Mademoiselle de Montijo wrote to the prefect to ask him to devote this sum to charity. Finally, on the 20th of January, 1853, the "civil" wedding took place at the Tuileries. The grand master of the ceremonies went with two court carriages for the imperial *fiancée*. The grand chamberlain, attended by the principal officers of the court, waited at the foot of the staircase of the Pavilion of Flora, to lead her into the private drawing-room where the emperor, Prince Jérôme and other members of his family, the cardinals, ambassadors, and ministers-plenipotentiary then in Paris were assembled. Napoleon III. wore the uniform of a general, with the Order of the Golden Fleece, while on her side the future empress wore a robe of point d'Alençon over a white satin skirt, while round her throat was the necklace ordered by the city of Paris, and which the emperor had purchased and presented to her. At nine o'clock the grand master of the ceremonies, who had received his orders from the emperor, led the way to the Salle des Maréchaux, where the civil wedding was to take place. It proved a tedious ceremony, so many persons had to sign their names!

But, at last, when no one else advanced to take up the pen the cortege moved on to the Salle de Spectacle, where the performers from the Opera House were waiting to execute a cantata, the words of which had been written by Méry. whilst Auber had composed the music:—

"A notre impératrice aux doux climats choisie,
Chantez avec des voix qui sachent nous ravir,
Les airs que redira l'écho d'Andalousie
Aux collines du Gage et du Guadalquivir.

"Espagne bien-aimée,
Ou le ciel est vermeil,
C'est toi qui l'as formée
D'un rayon de soleil!"

On the following day, January, 30th, an enormous crowd thronged the streets and gathered in the neighbourhood of Notre Dame, where the religious ceremony of marriage was to take place. A little before noon the gates of the Tuileries opened to allow of the egress of a couple of carriages, which old Parisians recognized as having seen at the coronation of Napoleon I. and the baptism of the King of Rome. The emperor and empress were in the first vehicle and Prince Napoleon and Prince Jérôme in the second one. Salutes were fired when the imperial pair returned from the ceremony, and showed themselves on the grand balcony of the Tuileries, and that evening, when dinner was over, a wedding cantata, composed by Madame Mélanie Waldor, was sung by the performers of the Opéra Comique, attired in Spanish costumes.

"Célestes concerts,
Douce harmonie,
Glissez dans les airs :
Chantez la grace unie
Au génie,
Chantez Eugénie
Et les amours
Durant toujours."

It was M. Ducoudray who acquainted Madame Delorge with all these particulars. A Parisian to the marrow of his bones, the good man prided himself on knowing everything that took place. Whenever five or six hundred open-mouthed spectators gathered together, one was sure to see him in the first row. It was thus that for fifty years he had witnessed every public event in France. He had seen the entrance of the allies in 1814, and the return from Elba the next year; he had seen Louis XVIII. and Charles X., Louis Philippe and the Republic of 1848. This was why, when he looked on the procession of Napoleon III. and the new empress, he said to himself: "Pshaw! This will end like all the rest."

During this marriage festival he was not so much struck by the grave and solemn air of M. de Combelaïne and the Viscount de Maumussy as they drove by in their carriages, as by the lack of enthusiasm shown by the populace. The scene-shifters of the ovation, the prompters and stage managers had all performed their tasks, no doubt, for the crowd was immense, and the railway lines had brought thousands of provincials to Paris—provincials who crushed and hustled the Parisians on the streets and boulevards; but this crowd was utterly unmoved—and, in fact, if there was any emotion at all, it was astonishment mingled with fear. Here and there judiciously scattered along the line of the procession were groups chosen to utter shouts of welcome and acclamations, but they aroused no echo. These official applauders awakened no enthusiasm.

In addition to the ordered poems, there were others of a very different flavour. It is when the liberty of the press is most restricted that anonymous pamphlets, shameful placards, and unworthy calumnies, are most widely circulated. What would have made the subject of an article couched in guarded language, then becomes the theme of a song which literally respects nothing. The article would have been forgotten in twenty-four hours, but the song lingers in memory and flies on the wings of some popular melody to the farthest limits of France, penetrating even to the most secluded villages. Mademoiselle de Montijo's early youth had not been without a dash of romance and a spice of adventure, and thus it offered a broad field for calumny and misrepresentation. Her mother, liking movement, change, and travel, life at watering-places, *fêtes*, and theatrical performances, had for several years dragged her from place to place—to London, Paris, and Pau, and through Germany. Parisians are prejudiced, and provincial Frenchmen even more so—and they cannot accept the free manners of foreign girls. They could not deny the beauty of the emperor's wife, but they insisted on its being marred by defects. Her warmest adherents called her good and kind, but far from clever; firm, but headstrong; simple, but coquettish; bigoted, rather than religious; *dévoté*, in fact, after the unreasoning fashion of a woman of her nation. "She recalls Marie-Antoinette, whom she professes to adore," said some of those dangerous friends whose praise conceals a treachery—intentional or otherwise. On the other hand, people of sense waited before they made up their minds—but they waited with anxiety, knowing the fatal influence which the example of a young and beautiful sovereign must exercise over the manners and morals of her time.

The new empress's position was a most difficult one in a court which dated from yesterday. She was surrounded by enemies, snares and ambushes; she found herself among people who were so astonished to see her where she was that they could hardly look at her without a laugh. To pass so abruptly from a roving life to the inexorable obligations of a throne

is something of a trial to a young woman. To find herself all at once the centre of observation, to be always *en scène*, to speak to everyone about everything, to occupy herself with fashions and politics, to show herself serious and frivolous, to be a woman of the world and a woman of heart, to keep the secret of her impressions, her sympathies and likings, and surmount her aversions, is indeed a formidable task. The Empress Eugénie did not succeed. If her courtiers told her she was popular, they deceived her—she never was. In vain did she multiply her benevolent works, her charitable institutions; she never touched the heart of the people. Sceptical and mocking France only respects the solemn. The French only understand a queen moving about in brocade and train, with a majestic step, and wearing a golden-jewelled crown, and they were astonished to see the empress in a short ruffled skirt, with high-heeled boots, and a pretty fresh hat, such as all the women about her wore on their heads. "Her simplicity is admirable," cried her partisans.

"No dignity!" grumbled the others.

It may here be remarked that the husbands whose wives adopted this admirable simplicity found it very costly. They discovered that all these pretty little dresses of inexpensive materials trimmed and scalloped, flounced and laced, ended by reason of their number, in being ten times dearer than the richer toilettes of other times. However, husbands were told that this was the fashion, and what could they say in reply? They grumbled at first, and then they became accustomed to it—their wives must do like other women of course. Thus the dressmakers had a glorious harvest, and one of them a "man milliner," gave himself such airs of importance, that one was reminded of the mantuamaker who, in the days of Marie Antoinette, so proudly exclaimed: "Her majesty and I have been at work together!"

Never had such extravagance been known—families were first ruined, and then corrupted—for no one chose to be eclipsed. Every frog swelled out in hopes of equalling the ox. Many of them burst. Enormous fortunes were made, and how? no one knew, but this sudden luxury aroused strange suspicions. When Combelaine rolled past in his brougham, drawn by a pair of magnificent horses—Combelaine, whom all Paris had seen in shoes down at heel—when Maumussy, once driven by his creditors from the boulevard, now shone forth as a gorgeous vision, and Madame d'Eljonsen, now the Princess d'Eljonsen, astonished all Paris by the magnificence of her *fêtes*—folks involuntarily clapped their hands on their pockets and said: "Where the deuce do these people get all their money?"

Matters, indeed, came to such a pass, that the official *Moniteur* was compelled to deny certain infamous statements which were circulated—reports spread on the Bourse and elsewhere respecting certain financial operations that high functionaries were accused of dabbling in. And, meantime, the price of everything went up, and money seemed to decrease in value. Worthy M. Ducoudray, who had been considered wealthy, began to think he had made a great mistake in retiring from business with so little. "If this goes on!" he sometimes said, "I shall end by not having enough to buy dry bread."

XIX.

"But it will not last—there is no need for alarm!" said various political prophets, in tones of calm confidence. It is true that it would have been quite impossible for them to say on what they founded their certainty. During these first years of the empire the most preposterous tales were circulated. At every turning you met people who said to you mysteriously, "You have heard the news, I presume. The empire won't last another month. The money's running low—the next instalment of interest on the National Debt will not be paid!"

However, Madame Delorge was not the sort of person to be moved by these puerilities; and if M. Ducoudray was inclined to argue her into credulity, she had M. Roberjot to hold her firm, for he was in a better position than almost anyone else to judge of the situation and the march of events. He had been elected and had taken his seat as a deputy. Bitter opponent as he was of the empire, he had not yet reached the point when it is necessary to wear those spectacles which shorten the vision. So he shook his head sadly as he said: "The empire will last for years, and if a war should chance to come, and a successful one, the opposition will be well nigh powerless."

M. Roberjot, like all men of sense, realized that war was the very essence of the empire. No doubt, Napoleon III. had said at Bordeaux: "The empire is peace." But it was clear that this was a mere saying—one of those promises that there is no risk in uttering, and which one can afterwards keep or break as one pleases. It was in the past that the real sentiments of the emperor were to be looked for—in his proclamations at Boulogne and Strasbourg, and still more in his replies before the Chamber of Peers during his trial. There, speaking to his judges, but addressing France, he had exclaimed: "I represent a principle, a cause, and a defeat. The principle is the sovereignty of the people, the cause is that of the empire, the defeat, Waterloo. The principle you have admitted, the cause you have served, the defeat you burn to avenge."

"And Napoleon III. will avenge it," said his partisans, boastfully, "and in exchange for the sterile liberties which he takes from France, he will give her the prestige of military glory."

Public opinion was therefore well prepared when it became known that France was going to war with Russia. England was this time our ally; her soldiers were to fight side by side with ours. Paris was all astir, but not with doubt or anxiety. We could only be conquerors. And, in truth, the Second Empire soon had a victory to chronicle—one gained by a man of the *coup d'état*, the Marshal de Saint-Arnaud. He was happy in dying soon afterwards with a flag for his winding sheet. But French impatience needed more than this victory of the Alma, and so Paris welcomed as certain, as incontestable, a despatch which had been brought, it was said, by a Cossack, and which announced the fall of Sebastopol. It was, indeed, chronicled by the official journal, whereupon stock rose, and Paris illuminated; but the next day it was understood that the Cossack was a financial *canard*, and that Sebastopol stood as firm as a rock. However, beyond causing large sums of money to change hands this false report had no evil consequences. French impatience only advanced events. After an heroic resistance, Sebastopol fell into our power, and following almost immediately on this glorious news

came the intelligence that the Emperor of Russia was at the point of death, that a congress would unite at Paris, and that peace would be signed against the desires of England.

Whilst the negotiations were pending, an event took place of great importance to the imperial family, one which filled all those, who owed their fortunes to the empire, with joy. It was officially announced that the empress was in an interesting condition, and on the 15th of March, 1856, the President of the Corps Législatif informed his colleagues that her majesty was at that moment suffering the pangs of childbirth. The most contradictory reports were at once circulated. It was said that the empress was very ill, that the accoucheur of the English queen, who had arrived in the night, despaired of her life. Others declared that the child—a girl—was dying. The truth was that, after considerable suffering, the empress had been delivered of a boy, at about three o'clock in the afternoon.

"Thus is the dynasty perpetuated!" said the imperial journals, and, in fact, everything smiled on the emperor, and the empire was at the height of its power. On the day when the plenipotentiaries came in full uniform to the Tuileries to present the treaty of Paris, they had signed, Napoleon III. appeared to be the arbiter of Europe.

"Why do you talk to me of Providence and divine justice?" said M. Ducoudray, that evening, to Madame Delorge, who had need of all her strength and hope in these days. If she had considered her enemies as beyond her reach on the morrow of the *coup d'état*, what was she to think now, when their fortune, allied to that of the empire, seemed imperishable.

After years of incessant investigation, the fate of Laurent Cornevin was still shrouded in mystery, and Roberjot himself said: "We have been misled by Flora Misri's words. Poor Laurent must have been murdered long since."

This was also the conviction of Cornevin's wife, who, after long hoping against hope, now put on her bills "The Widow Cornevin," for she had her bills now. The advice given by Madame Delorge had brought her happiness and prosperity. Her small establishment had succeeded to a degree that surpassed all expectations. Hardly had she set up in business for herself than customers of the best class came to her so rapidly that she was obliged to take two assistants, in addition to her daughters, and then four more. Soon, moreover, she had to employ a forewoman, for she had as much as she could do to receive customers and take their measures and try on their dresses. Then the rooms in the Rue Pigale were found to be too small, and, after much hesitation, she yielded to the solicitations of Madame Delorge and M. Ducoudray, and took another apartment in the Chaussée d'Antin, at an enormous rental. It was the rent which had caused her to hesitate, for like all persons who have known much trouble, she distrusted prosperity, regarding all the favours of fortune as so many snares. "Suppose I should be unable to pay this rent!" she said to her friends. "Why not be content when one is doing well?"

But M. Ducoudray would not listen to this reasoning. "Where," he asked, "would he be now if he had confined himself to that narrow shop where his parents had vegetated for fifty years, making both ends meet with infinite difficulty. No, no," he continued, "you must go on. I will come to the rescue if you need me."

And he insisted on her accepting a loan of a thousand crowns, with which to move and establish herself, for he wished that everything should be perfect in the new establishment she started, and in harmony with the

fashionable locality. So she had a reception-room, with a handsome carpet, chandelier, and mirrors. And the public did honour to her in a fashion which flattered the experience of the old merchant. In vain did Madame Cornevin raise her prices; all her former customers followed, new ones came crowding in, and she speedily became one of the fashionable dressmakers. So that on the third anniversary of her installation, when she made out her accounts on the 31st of December, she found that she had made, in the past twelve months, more than twenty thousand francs, and that when every bill was paid she would have eight thousand to invest. And yet her expenses had greatly increased, for she no longer accepted the allowance made her by Madame Delorge, but in fact insisted on paying a certain amount towards the expenses of her son Léon, who was being brought up with Raymond. She also defrayed half the amount of her son Jean's bills. She no longer allowed her daughters to sew all day, but sent them to school in the neighbourhood, where they received that practical education which is essential in France to a merchant's wife. For herself, the courageous woman spent nothing. She reproached herself even for the few francs which she paid every month to an old teacher, who, each evening after the departure of her workwomen, came to give her a lesson, for she felt the necessity of raising herself to the level of her new position. She did not wish her children to blush for her later on, and refrain from showing her letters, because they were misspelt.

She was an example of what an ordinary intelligence, backed up by a strong will, can accomplish. No one that ever saw her in her handsome *salon* receiving her noble and elegant clients would have recognised the brave and honest but somewhat coarse housekeeper of Montmartre, who could be seen twice a week going up the Rue Mercadet with her bundle of wet linen which she had just washed at the public wash-house, and which she meant to dry at her window. Her constant companionship with Madame Delorge had given her an air and manner and certain little ways which no one would have imagined her capable of. She was not out of place in the house of her protectress. She was very reserved and silent when any guests were present, and she simply appeared to be a woman of extreme timidity. But there was no prosperity capable of effacing from her memory all that she had suffered and the immense loss she had sustained. Six years after the disappearance of her husband she would turn pale and her superb black eyes would flash fire at the very sound of the Count de Combelaïne's name. "Those who pretend that Time effaces all," she said, "have never known what it is to love or to hate." To her, indeed, Time was as nothing.

One Sunday, in 1857, it was arranged she should dine at her friend's with M. Ducoudray and the children. She came in late, and so agitated that she could hardly speak. She had just met Grollet, the employé in the Elysée stables, whom MM. de Maumussy and de Combelaïne had so skillfully substituted for Laurent Cornevin. "It was in the Rue Blanche that I met him," she said, in answer to the questions of her friends. "I knew him when he turned the corner, though I had not seen him since the day when he offered me breakfast, albeit he was already meditating his frightful treason. He is a very different person now. He looks like a wealthy shopkeeper. He wears a watch-chain with links as big as finger-rings, and a shirt with diamond studs. He knew me, too. He came up to me and looked at me from head to foot with a most impudent expression. 'Upon my life!' he said, 'we are dressed like a duchess—we make silk dresses nowadays, don't we? I am delighted to see that we have found worthy

successors to poor Cornevin!’ His tone and look were so insulting that tears of anger came to my eyes. But I kept them back. I wished to know what he was doing, and I asked him several questions. Time has brought him good luck apparently, and the blood-money of my poor Laurent has increased in his hands. He left the Elysée after the *coup d’état* and started a livery stable, as he knew his business and is skilful. As he had powerful protectors his business has prospered, and he is now at the head of one of the most important establishments in Paris. Nor is this all. He is associated with an architect of fabulous wealth—a man named Verdale. They two buy land and houses where the new streets are going to be cut, and as the architect knows everything that is planned in the way of improvements, they make as much money as they like.”

Too prudent to confide to anyone the secret she had suppressed, Madame Delorge was the only person present who knew the origin of the architect’s great fortune, and she alone could wonder at that mysterious law which binds rascals together. “But is the architect after all so very wealthy?” she asked M. Roberjot at his first visit.

“My good friend Verdale,” he replied, in that tone of biting irony which made him so many enemies—“my dear and honourable classmate ought to be and is undoubtedly fabulously rich. He has put a *de* before his name already, and some fine morning he will awake a baron, and decorated. I saw his card the other day—it was ‘A. de Verdale.’”

Madame Delorge looked at her adviser in amazement. “Do you see this man nowadays?” she asked.

“He comes to see me sometimes.”

“What! in spite of that terrible letter?”

“On account of that terrible letter. He comes regularly every six months to buy it, and at each visit he offers me a little higher price than before. The last time he named 500,000 francs.” The enormity of the sum took away his companion’s breath. “Why are you so astonished?” asked the lawyer. “That is not such a very large sum for my friend. Has he not the Princess d’Eljonsen as his Egeria? She is a lady who is very subject to dreams. As soon as she has one, she sends for her architect, and when he appears she says. ‘Verdale, I saw a new street in my dreams; it run from such a point to such another, and passed by certain places.’ ‘Very well, princess,’ says my dear friend. And at once, without the smallest hesitation, he begins to buy all the estates he can get hold of on the line the princess has indicated. And he does wisely, for the street is decided on shortly afterwards. My Verdale is acute; he gets superb indemnities from the municipality, hands over a portion of the proceeds to the princess, and the thing is done.”

Madame Delorge looked at M. Roberjot with sincere admiration. We are ready to admit to our readers that there was nothing in his conduct which could be called heroic, but she had lived too long not to know that in our days such disinterestedness as he had displayed in refusing a share of Verdale’s money is rare, and that it is not every one who relinquishes an enormous sum which might have been accepted without danger, and without injuring anyone. She extended her hand. “You have done nobly, sir,” she said, “and I thank you!”

But the lawyer hardly dared touch her fingers, for he, too, had resisted the dissolving action of Time. He had renounced all hope of being loved by Madame Delorge, but he had never ceased to love her; and he had the satisfaction of seeing that events had served him better than he had dared to

hope. The cruel pecuniary cares which had embittered Madame Delorge's days, and had rendered her nights sleepless during the first months of her widowhood, had disappeared—comfort and ease had returned to her fireside, for she was no longer hampered by the annuity she allowed Madame Cornevin. Léon cost her nearly nothing, and finally two unexpected legacies had doubled her capital. The first of these had come from the father of her husband. The poor man had not long survived the death of his son, who was his pride and his joy. He had talked of living with his daughter-in-law, but when the time came for him to leave the farm where he had resided so many years, his courage failed him. He lived a few months longer, and when he died he bequeathed sixty thousand francs to his daughter-in-law. The second inheritance she received came from Mademoiselle de la Roche-cordeau, and was most unexpected, for twice a day during fifteen years the old lady had sworn that she would throw her fortune into the Loire rather than leave a farthing of it to her niece. Unfortunately for her charitable intentions she had, although a *dévoté*, so terrible a fear of death that she could never decide to make a will. "It will be time," she always said, "to call in a notary when I feel my end approaching."

She did not feel it, however; for one evening when she had dined more heavily than usual, she flew into one of those fits of anger which were not uncommon with her, and was suddenly struck down by apoplexy. She only had time to murmur, "I am dying, and Elizabeth will have everything!"

And Elizabeth did have nearly all; for, as the nearest relative, she received seven-tenths of what her aunt left, or about 150,000 francs. She accepted this money, and explained to her son her reasons for doing so. "I believe, my boy," she remarked, moreover; "that this fortune will never induce you to imitate those young men who dissipate their money and health in vulgar pleasures—nor ought it ever induce you to neglect the sacred duties you are called upon to fulfill."

These words were almost exactly the same that Madame Cornevin repeated to her son each time she found herself with him. "Remember that your father has been cowardly assassinated by wretches whose crime he had detected, and that we do not even know what has become of his body."

Perhaps M. de Combelaine and M. de Maumussy would have been surprised had they realized the change which eight years had wrought in these two women, whom they considered weak, friendless, and poor. They were no longer so. They were both nearly rich—rich enough, at all events, to pay well for their vengeance. Their children, who had been a heavy charge, were now a support. Raymond Delorge, Léon and Jean Cornevin, were nearly men—and the hour was nigh when the hopes of Madame Delorge might prove realities rather than chimeras.

Part III.

RAYMOND.

I.

It was a proud and happy day to the two mothers when they contemplated their sons, and said to each other: Our task is fulfilled, and we can wait in peace for the hour we desire. We may now delegate the struggle to our children. We may die, perhaps, but the task we have undertaken will be carried on by arms more robust than our own. Their pride and their confidence were certainly well founded. Eleven years had passed since that bloody catastrophe at the Elysée. It was now the close of 1863. Raymond and Léon were on the point of leaving the Polytechnic School, where they had studied together. They had worked hard, with that obstinate perseverance which is occasionally a characteristic of youth, and their scholastic career had proved one long success. The two names, Delorge and Cornevin, linked together year after year at prized day celebrations, at last attracted the notice of the few Parisians who knew anything of contemporary history. If that of Cornevin was new to them, that of Delorge seemed familiar. "Delorge!" they said; "where have we heard that name before? Wait a moment! Was it not that of the general whose mysterious death made so slight a stir at the time of the *coup d'état*, and who was said to have been killed in a duel by M. de Combelaïne?"

The fact is that neither Léon nor Raymond, in spite of Madame Delorge's caution, had been perfectly discreet. They had their boyish friendships, and could not avoid alluding to the past, or speaking of their present hatred, thirst for vengeance, and hopes for the future. The friends in whom they confided often repeated the dramatic story to their parents at home.

At the grand distribution of prizes, which followed the competition between the State schools in Paris, in 1859, Raymond took first honours, and his success was made the occasion for a noisy outbreak. The young fellows all rose, waved their caps, and shouted, "Bravo, Delorge! Three cheers for the son of General Delorge!" And they kept this up with such persistence, that the Minister of Public Instruction turned deadly pale. This manifestation was annoying and absurd, declared the semi-official newspaper, the *Constitutionnel*, and if we had the honour of managing the school to which young Delorge belongs, we should request this precocious disturber of the public peace, and his friends, to finish their studies elsewhere.

However, the next day, the head reporter of an opposition journal called on Madame Delorge, and begged her to tell him all she knew of the circumstances of her husband's death. "He proposed," he said, "to start an agitation which would prove useful to the cause of liberty, and very probably result in a full inquiry being made."

M. Ducoudray, who was present at this interview, was unable to hide his satisfaction, "A splendid chance!" he whispered in the widow's ears.

But she did not so regard it. It seemed to her that it would be profanation to abandon her husband's pure name to newspaper warfare. She shuddered at the idea, and implored the journalist to relinquish his plan. "No, no, sir," she said; "let the dead sleep in peace!"

After this the boys resumed their studies, and finally left the Polytechnic School with highly creditable honours. They were just twenty, but they seemed older than their years. Tall, broad-shouldered, of herculean strength, like his father, young Cornevin, with his fair skin, light hair, and calm composure, was often taken for an Englishman. Although quite capable of an act of folly, he was one of those young fellows who control themselves, and go on to the very end, imperturbably and methodically. Very different was Raymond, who was remarkably good-looking, tall and dark-haired, with pale cheeks, and flashing eyes, and all the grace and fascination of a southerner; he was endowed, too, with a voice and eloquence of language, which thrilled all who heard him. He was full of enthusiasm, capable of prodigious feats, but easily discouraged. His quick, vivacious mind conceived most brilliant projects, started them well, and managed them wisely for a time, but at the first check he lost his head. In presence of an obstacle which Léon would have struggled with and conquered, he retreated helplessly! Jean Cornevin described him well when he said: "Raymond has the courage of a hero, the nerves of a woman, and the sensibility of a child."

Jean, on his side, was totally unlike both his brother and young Delorge. He had never been a brilliant student. At seventeen indeed he threw off school-yoke, declaring that he had had enough of it, and in future should do nothing but paint and draw. Short and dark, plain, but for his eyes which flashed with wit and humour, Jean Cornevin concealed under an air of affected carelessness a very keen intelligence, remarkable ability, and unbounded ambition. Prompt to seize the ridiculous side of things, and having a pitiless tongue, he was in the habit of saying that he should make his enemies help him attain his ends.

However, great as was the diversity of these young men's temperaments and ideas, it did not prevent them from feeling the most hearty affection for one another. One tie united them—stronger even than those of relationship—a common hatred and common sorrow. They often disagreed in their discussions as to the means to be adopted to reach the goal—but the object before them was the same. They were each determined to make any sacrifice to punish the scoundrels who had robbed them of their fathers. Chivalric Delorge would cry out: "I shall fight my enemies openly, in broad daylight!" While cold, methodical Léon would say: "We must learn to watch for the propitious occasion which never fails to come to patient men."

Jean, who was at once incapable of moderation, and full of wrath, then exclaimed in his turn: "Why do you talk, Raymond, of fighting in broad daylight? Was it not in the dark that our fathers were slain? With such enemies no night is too dark, and no weapons are disloyal. I would become the boon companion of convicts, if it were necessary to achieve my purpose. And you, Léon, enrage me by preaching patience. To wait is simply to allow these fellows to enjoy their crime in peace."

He acted on these opinions with so much energy that at eighteen he was involved in that famous plot of the Bois de Bologne, the discovery of which placed thirty-seven persons in the dock, a dozen of whom were transported to Lambessa. What rendered Jean Cornevin's situation extremely unpleasant was, that when his room was searched a series of sketches were

found, called "The Panthéon of the Second Empire." They caricatured all the leading men of the times, and "their wickedness," said the Commissary of Police, in his report, "made me shudder with indignation."

However, M. Roberjot took active steps to liberate this precocious conspirator, and was successful. "You see now," said his brother to him when he was released from the Conciergerie where he had been detained for some weeks—"You see now what your mad precipitation leads you to. You are henceforth a marked man, and we, too, as your companions, may always consider ourselves under the eye of the police. And it is all the more stupid," continued Léon, "for the empire has reached its zenith, and has nothing to do but to descend."

To say this was bold, if not premature—for there were as yet but few clear-sighted people who could detect the rottenness beneath the seeming prosperity of the reign of Napoleon III. The very excess of this seeming prosperity was one great cause of ruin. For it is not in vain that brutal passions are over-stimulated—whether they be sensual appetites or a thirst for gold. Léon, being an attentive and intelligent observer, could detect the embarrassment which certain participators in the *coup d'état* were now causing the government by their cupidity. He knew that the Minister of the Interior, M. Billaud, had issued a circular, in which he alluded to certain individuals who, boasting of an influence they had never possessed, succeeded in gaining a large income by demanding a tithe from the promoters of all great enterprises. This circular, as may be imagined, had caused much talk. "Who are these certain individuals?" people asked, inquisitively.

Then the Minister of War in his turn launched a circular "to prevent the officers of the army from applying too often to the emperor for money."

"Well! well!" muttered the public, "is our ruler going to desert the army!"

The truth is, the emperor had a perception of the danger. When Ponsard brought out his comedy, "*La Bourse*,"—which pilloried Stock Exchange speculators—at the Théâtre Français, Napoleon III. wrote to him to congratulate him, at the same time begging him to bring all his talent to bear against the fatal passion of gambling. Similar congratulations were also sent to M. Oscar de Vallée, after the publication of his book, "*Les Manieurs d'Argent*," which dealt with the same subject. But what could a comedy, a book, and two imperial letters do towards curbing speculation? Many persons who speculated in stocks hardly possessed a competence. Meantime prices were steadily going up. The huge houses by which Verdale and his friends were pocketing enormous sums, occasioned a great advance in rentals, although the *Moniteur* persistently declared that the number of new houses built largely surpassed that of those which were demolished. After all, this was quite possible. But as landlords now only built palaces, divided into immense apartments, people with limited incomes did not know where to live, for they could not expend the sixth of their revenue on rent. It is true that Paris had become a sort of caravansary whither from all quarters of the globe there flocked all those who had money to spend, and those who wished to make a fortune, no matter by what means. It is certain that the theatres, ball-rooms, and restaurants were never so well filled. It is true that legions of women, with yellow hair and glaring toilettes, invaded the boulevards, driving honest housewives and mothers indoors. It is also certain that the return from the races—from those of Vincennes, for instance, with hundreds of carriages crowded with young men and women excited by champagne—furnished great amusement to the

humble denizens of the faubourgs; and Lord Holland was unquestionably right when he wrote to the *Times*: "Paris is the city where the most amusement can be obtained." However, on the other hand, as an acute observer said: "It is all very fine—but this is the road to ruin!"

Raymond Delorge and Léon Cornevin knew, by the way in which Roberjot talked, that the men who had been stripped and crushed by the *coup d'état*, were shaking themselves, raising their heads, and preparing for revenge. And yet, although the empire was execrated by very many people, numbers looked upon it as a lesser evil, and remarked: "The sword of Napoleon III. is preferable to the daggers of the sworn foes of public order and peace!" This was an allusion to the perverse utterances of the socialists, and the absurd theories revealed by certain law suits—that of the Marianne society for instance, and that of the Commune Revolutionnaire.

It is true that the rising generation, of which Raymond and the young Corvenins formed part, were irritated by the prudence of their elders. When Beranger died, a hundred thousand persons followed his funeral procession, in which the representatives of the government figured, knowing that he had been the poet of the First Empire, at a time when Liberalism and Bonapartism rhymed; knowing, too, that he had done more for the popularity of Napoleon I. with his one refrain—

"Parlez-nous de lui, grand'mère,
Grand'mère parlez-nous de lui."

than all the official panegyrists put together. Not a shout disturbed the solemn quiet of the funeral ceremony, but ten or twelve wild youths endeavoured to force the gates of the cemetery, which the police kept closed. However, they were promptly arrested. Jean Cornevin, who was attracted by the noise, as a moth is attracted by light, was among them; and his brother, with Raymond, went to see him that night at the station-house, to which he had been consigned. But they could not obtain his release, nor could all the exertions of M. Roberjot mitigate his sentence. He spent a month in prison. A little later, Cavaignac's death took place, almost unnoticed. It was on his estate of Ourne, in the Sarthe, that this worthy citizen, who had shown as much disinterestedness and dignity as any man in France, breathed his last in comparative oblivion. However, his body was brought to Paris and interred in the Montmartre Cemetery, in the same tomb as that of his brother. No funeral orations were delivered, for the government confiscated them, as it had confiscated the addresses which were to have been spoken beside the graves of Lamennais and Marrast.

It was about this time that Raymond Delorge put in execution a long cherished project. The day he was one and-twenty he summoned the two Corvenins, and in a more solemn tone than was common to him, he said: "I am about to appeal to your friendship for a very great favour, but what I say you must regard as confidential. I have made up my mind to challenge De Combelaïne, and I expect you two to be my seconds."

Léon Cornevin started. "You are mad, Raymond!" he cried.

Raymond had expected some reply of this kind. "Mad or not, this is what I shall do," was his reply.

"And if we refuse?"

Raymond shook his head sadly, but in a more determined tone than before, he rejoined: "I should regret it, but I should try and find some other friends not more devoted but less prudent than yourselves!"

They knew Raymond so thoroughly that they recognized the futility of any attempt to dissuade him.

If anything, moreover, could have affected him, it would have been the significant silence of the adventurous Jean, who was generally ready for anything.

Léon did not propose to give up the point, however. "Let us admit," he said, "that we undertake the mission you desire to intrust to us, my dear Raymond, what are we to say to Monsieur de Combelaine?"

"That he must fight with me!"

Even Jean shrugged his shoulders at this. "But on what ground?" he cried. "Why?" The colour rose to Raymond's face. "What!" he cried. "Has not this scoundrel assassinated my father?"

Léon interrupted him. "That is very true, only, as you know, he denies it. Besides, is there not a certain paper, signed and sealed, which declares De Combelaine to be innocent, and asserts that General Delorge fell in honourable combat?"

"And what does that prove?"

"Simply that De Combelaine will refuse your challenge."

"No—for he is brave—or rather, he has faith in his skill as a swordsman. No—for I hate him, and he must be tired of thinking of me and my vengeance. No—for he won't be sorry, having killed the father, to have a means of honestly getting rid of the son."

"And if he does refuse?"

"Then you can tell him that I will compel him to fight."

"And if he still refuses?"

"Then I will take the affair on my shoulders."

Léon Cornevin was about to reply, but Jean spoke first; he was very much provoked by Raymond's obstinacy. "And you say," he cried, "that I am a headstrong scatterbrain! You must have lost your senses to think for a moment that De Combelaine will follow you on to the field. It is true, that once upon a time, when he had nothing to lose, he might have done so—for a mere nothing. But now he is as wealthy as he pleases. Life has a very different aspect to him, and yet you imagine he will risk his precious skin as you propose! Pshaw! he is not quite such a fool."

It was with the resigned air of a man caught in a thunder-shower that Raymond heard these words. "I came," he said, when there was a moment's pause, "not to ask advice, but a service. Will you be my seconds or not? If you say yes, we will arrange details—if not, I will go elsewhere, and in an hour I shall have what I need."

The two brothers looked at each other. If they refused, would not Raymond turn to comparative strangers, as he threatened, and was it not far better they should act as his seconds, for indifferent persons, either from stupidity or malice, might do something absurd.

"Very well," said Jean, at last, "we will act as your seconds."

Raymond's stiffened features relaxed. "Ah! thanks," he cried, "thanks. I knew I could rely on you!"

But the warmth of his thanks did not dispel the reserve of his friends. "Don't thank us," interrupted Léon, abruptly, "for it is against our convictions that we embark in this affair. Give us your instructions. We will follow them."

At all events Raymond had succeeded, and he smiled on hearing this. "My instructions are simple enough," he replied. "I wish to fight with De Combelaine. Let him choose the weapons, hour, and place. I care for

nothing except to see him stand in front of me. You need not be troubled. Good swordsman as he may be, I am no novice, as you know, and I fancy that I shall prove a disagreeable surprise to him.

The two brothers made no further objection. As they could not avoid the affair, they cared little about the details. "Very well," they said, "we will call on your man to-morrow."

And they did so at nine o'clock in the morning.

II.

M. DE COMBELAINE resided in the Rue du Cirque, in a small, but new and most luxurious mansion, which he owed, it was said, to imperial munificence in return for certain services which are not often boasted of. There was nothing commonplace about this house, which was Verdale's architectural masterpiece. It stood at the end of a court-yard, being reached by a flight of marble steps, decorated on either side with tall faience vases. On the right and the left were the servants' quarters—the stables where eight magnificent horses ate their oats out of marble mangers—and the carriage-house full of equipages covered with green cloth.

"Upon my life!" grumbled Léon Cornevin, "the emperor lodges his friends well!"

Before the gate stood the porter, a stout man of jovial countenance, who was smoking his morning cigar, an expensive one.

"Yes, the count receives this morning," he said, in answer to the young men's inquiries. "You can go in."

They proceeded to the hall, paved with marble and resplendent with gilding, where a footman in a showy livery took their cards, and conducted them into an ante-room, where he asked them to wait. There were already three gentlemen there when our young friends entered. They were standing near a window talking, and their conversation was so interesting that they paid no attention to the new arrivals. "Well, then," asked one of the three, "do you intend to let him have the carriage?"

"How can I do otherwise?" sighed the person who was spoken to. "Am I not too far in to retreat? Do you know that he owes me fifty thousand francs?"

"The deuce he does!" interrupted the third. "Why on earth were you so mad as to let him have that amount of credit?"

"But he owes you twenty thousand!"

"That's true, but I have just come to say that he must pay me so much on account."

"He won't give you a sou."

"Then I will levy on the furniture——"

"And then——"

"Then! Why, I will obtain a judgment in my favour, and take everything—the house, the horses—and your carriages, my dear fellow!——" The others laughed; but so ominously that the speaker added: "What is there to laugh at? Perhaps you will kindly tell me?"

"Oh! certainly; my boy, you don't get up quite early enough in the morning to take in M. de Combelaïne. Don't take the trouble to do what you suggest—your stamped paper would be thrown away. Everything he has here is in some other person's name. His furniture belongs to the upholsterer—his horses are in the name of his valet——"

"But the house?"

"Is mouldy with mortgages. The emperor had barely given it to him when he raised money on it."

Jean and Léon held their breaths lest they might betray their presence, and so interrupt this instructive conversation.

"Good Heavens!" said the man who had been threatening, "are his affairs in such a state as that?"

"He is ruined—that's all!"

"And yet he made a hundred thousand francs by one single speculation a little while ago!"

"Call it a hundred and fifty thousand."

"He has two or three matters on hand to-day——"

"Excuse me; he has a dozen."

"Which will bring him as much more."

"Double as much, you may say."

"And he is ruined!"

"To that point that his servants have no wages, except what they steal. They don't suffer, however. You are a jeweller, well give a ring to his valet, and what he'll tell you will make you open your eyes, I fancy."

At any other time Jean and Léon would have shouted with laughter, so comical was the jeweller's consternation. "Is this man a gulf," he cried—"a bottomless abyss?"

"That's it, precisely."

"What does he do with all his money?"

"He spends it, of course."

"In what way? He pays for nothing."

"He gambles, my boy. Women and suppers. Bets at the races—*fêles* and journeys. Do you think that they cost nothing?"

But they checked their speech suddenly, for at this moment a valet appeared and approached Raymond's friends. "The count wishes to see you in his private room, gentlemen," he said, bowing.

M. de Combelaïne was perhaps as impoverished as his tradespeople had said; but there was no sign of it in these apartments, which displayed all the aggressive luxury typical of the Second Empire—the luxury of the *parvenu* eager to dazzle and enjoy. That was all that the two young men noticed as they passed through a preposterously decorated dining-room, and a vast reception-hall which was one mass of gilding. They were really disturbed by the thought of finding themselves face to face with their father's murderer. How their hearts beat when the servant threw open the door and announced them.

They entered the count's study, or rather smoking-room, which more than any other indicated its master's tastes and habits. There were no books, no papers lying about, but a quantity of arms of all epochs and climes—guns and swords, pieces of armour, sabres, and daggers. On the table or desk lay five or six revolvers of different systems, waiting for the count to try them and pronounce an opinion on their respective worth. Near this table M. de Combelaïne, who was attired in a gorgeous dressing-gown, sat, or rather reclined, in a huge arm-chair. He had succeeded in acquiring a new mask appropriate to the circumstances and to his new situation. And the audience who had hissed him at Brussels when he performed on the stage would never have recognized him with his hair brought down over his temples, his moustache outrageously waxed, his eyes gleaming mournfully, and every other feature impassive. He copied his master—that was all—the

master who took such pains to deaden his eyes, darken his beard, petrify his face, and prevent his lips from giving vent to aught but commonplace, expressionless words. So well, indeed, had the emperor succeeded in these efforts that the acute Italians named him Taciturn III.

When Léon and Jean Cornevin appeared, M. de Combelaïne rose, and showing them chairs, exclaimed: "Be seated, gentlemen."

But they both replied at once: "We will stand, sir, if you please."

Their idea was that the count would feign not to know their names; but in this they were mistaken. "Gentlemen," he said, "at the time of the *coup d'état* a man called Laurent Cornevin disappeared. Was he a relative of yours?"

"We are his sons," answered Léon.

"Excuse my question, gentlemen. Laurent occupied a very humble position at the Elysée?"

"He was a groom."

"While you, gentlemen——"

"We," interrupted Jean, in a hoarse voice, "we ought, I am well aware, to have starved to death, and no doubt those who suppressed the father believed that hunger would soon do as much for the children; but God decided differently. We were fortunate in finding friends who made us what we are."

It was without the slightest sign of emotion that M. de Combelaïne bowed. "I can well understand your feelings, gentlemen," he said, "when you speak of your father. His disappearance was one of those frightful accidents of which too many occur in times of civil disturbances."

"Oh! an accident—was it?" said Jean.

The Count did not seem to hear, but calmly continued speaking. "This was, of course," said he, "a most cruel blow to the unfortunate man's family. I suffered also, for this mysterious disappearance exposed me to the most odious suspicions, which not even a solemn decision of the judicial authorities failed to dispel entirely. My enemies dared to insinuate that Laurent Cornevin had been the witness of a crime."

Jean's brains reeled at the idea of such audacity as the count displayed. "We did not come here to ask for an account of our father's death," he interrupted.

M. de Combelaïne did not wink. "It would be quite natural if you did," he blandly replied, "especially after the detestable reports which have been circulated. Were you to do so, I should reply that all the influence and credit I possess have been employed in trying to find your father. Yes, all that it is humanely possible to do I have done—uselessly, alas!—as I can show you." Léon was about to speak, but De Combelaïne stopped him with a gesture, and went on. "Permit me. When I am attacked I must be allowed to defend myself. I knew the unfortunate situation of your mother. I ascertained it all from a person who is your mother's sister—your aunt, therefore—and a lady for whom I have an especial regard. I speak of Madame Flori Misri. But was it possible for me to openly aid your mother, worthy as she was? Of course not, for it would have been to give my enemies an opportunity for circulating even greater falsehoods. I told Flora to assist her sister, but Madame Cornevin rejected her help most haughtily. Was that my fault? If you doubt my good will towards your family, allow me to remind you that it was through my influence that your grandparents each obtained a lucrative position. I would also remind you

that I have secured for one of your mother's brothers a sinecure which places him above want."

Jean Cornevin could not endure another word. A succession of slaps on his cheek could not have enraged him more than this enumeration of certain relatives, all of whom he held in utter horror. "Enough!" he exclaimed in a threatening tone; "I have told you that it was not for ourselves we came here. We were sent by our intimate friend—by our brother Raymond, the son of General Delorge."

Remarkable as had been M. de Combelaine's composure, he started now. "Ah! What does he want of me?"

"Raymond Delorge wishes to revenge his father," cried Jean; "he wishes to meet you in a duel——"

M. de Combelaine was far too intelligent not to have looked forward to something of this kind. His features were unmoved, but his colour changed. He was evidently holding himself in check. After a moment's silence he replied: "I don't know that I blame Monsieur Raymond Delorge; I should do the same were I in his place. But I—I cannot accept the meeting he proposes."

"And yet, sir——"

"I declare that a duel between us is simply impossible," interrupted the count. "Yes, it is true I killed General Delorge, but it was in self-defence, for I loved him, and I only fought with him after I had been insulted and threatened by him; and after this horrible misfortune, after killing the father, would you have me run the risk of killing the son? No, not at any price! On the day following that deplorable duel in the Garden of the Elysée, I swore a solemn oath never to fight again, and I shall keep that oath, no matter what happens."

"That is a prudent decision when a man has a great deal to lose," muttered Léon Cornevin.

M. de Combelaine must have also sworn that he would keep his temper, for he did not wince. "I have given you my decision, gentlemen," he said.

But Léon had something more to say. "I shall not urge you, sir," he replied, in an icy tone, "only it is my duty to warn you of the consequences of your refusal——"

"Ah!"

"Raymond is determined to obtain the satisfaction to which he considers himself entitled——"

"Sir——"

"He will stop at nothing to compel you to accede to his wishes; he will resort to violence——"

"Not a word more, sir," cried De Combelaine, starting up. "Not a word more!" and with a convulsive gesture his hand involuntarily grasped one of the revolvers lying on the table. The Combelaine of bygone times, the quarrelsome gambler, to whom a duel was almost an every day affair, seemed resuscitated. "You do not know the kind of man I am," he continued. "You do not know that if a human being had formerly spoken as you have just done he would not have left this room alive!"

"Do you think, then, that we ought to have left you in ignorance of our friend's intentions?" asked Léon, calmly.

De Combelaine started forward with a terrible gesture. "Very well, then," he cried, "at the first indication of any violence from Raymond Delorge, I ——" But he stopped short, being greatly agitated.

At last, however, he mastered himself with a superhuman effort. "Nothing," he replied; "nothing!" And so saying, he laid down the revolver he held; and then, in a calmer tone, although his voice still trembled, he continued. "This affair is too grave a one for me to give a positive answer without consideration. Will Monsieur Delorge grant me twenty-four hours?"

"Most certainly."

"Then, gentlemen, give me your address. At noon—on the day after to-morrow—one of my friends will call upon you, and let you know my decision."

Feeling much disturbed, and not all pleased with themselves, the two brothers left the house, where shame was veiled with splendour. They felt they had made a great mistake in accepting this mission from Raymond, and they had only too clearly understood what De Combelaïne meant from his very first words. This man had not merely murdered General Delorge, but their own father as well, and he had instantly availed himself of their false position. Had he not at once confounded them with their mother's family, with that family, alas! the sons of which grew up for the prison of Mazas, and the daughters for Saint Lazare! Had he not taunted them with what he had done for their grandparents? Had he not boasted that their aunt, their mother's sister, Flora Misri, was his mistress? What a disgrace. And yet they had been compelled to bear all these insults spoken in a tone of quiet impudence. "The scoundrel!" cried Jean, as they passed through the gate. "I should have preferred his firing on us with the revolver he had in his hand."

Léon shook his head. "We are children," he said, "and we have been guilty of the most abject piece of folly. When a man attacks a wild beast he ought to be armed well enough to kill it. We attacked Combelaïne, and we are unarmed. This man had forgotten us—but we have recalled our existence to him, and reminded him that we may become dangerous. He won't fight—but our imprudence will cost us dear."

The two brothers well knew that Raymond was expecting them with keen anxiety, but circumstances were now so critical, and they felt themselves charged with so heavy a responsibility, that they determined to consult M. Roberjot before seeing their friend, and this in spite of the promise of secrecy which he had exacted from them. The lawyer was just taking his seat at table when they were ushered in. "Ah!" he cried, "is Master Jean in trouble again?"

Léon was greatly embarrassed, but still he accurately related the whole affair—Raymond's entreaties—their spell of waiting in the ante-room—the talk of the tradespeople—De Combelaïne's reception, his refusal and anger, and final request for twenty-four hours' delay. M. Roberjot waited till the young fellow had finished, and then angrily exclaimed, "The devil take you!" Léon, who was utterly aghast, attempted to speak; but the lawyer would not listen. "That your brother Jean should be guilty of such folly," he cried "does not surprise me; but you, Léon—a sensible fellow, a sage, a philosopher——"

"But, sir," expostulated Léon, "if we had not yielded to Raymond he would have appealed to the first person he saw——"

"But why on earth did you not tell me, gentlemen? I would have shown Raymond the folly of his conduct, and if he had persisted I should have collared him and said: 'Look here, young man, before fighting with any other person you must first fight with me.'" Roberjot was so angry

that he forgot to eat, and with his knife in one hand and his fork in the other, he gesticulated as if he had been addressing the Chamber of Deputies. "So your idea," he continued "is that, when you have a mortal enemy, and see him on the verge of an abyss, you ought to call out to him to take care?"

When Jean Cornevin, who was a rash, headstrong fellow, was guilty of an act of folly, he owned it with the best grace in the world, but Léon, cold and grave by nature, was destitute of this ingratiating quality. He did not like to seem in the wrong, and if, however, he was shown his mistake, he was all the more disposed to persist in it. "I don't see," he answered, in rather a piqued tone, "how our step can change Monsieur de Combelaïne's situation."

Roberjot shrugged his shoulders. "Since you don't see it," said he, "I will explain. For the last ten years De Combelaïne has improved the advantages he derived from the *coup d'état*. For ten years he has been receiving vast sums. He sells his influence, and that of his friends. He makes money at the Bourse out of the secrets that are confided to him, or that he surprises; and he draws at sight on the imperial purse. However, where is he to-day? Of all the millions he has handled, nothing remains but the regret that he has not had more, and a mad longing to recover them. His situation is just what it was on the eve of the 2nd of December. No, I am mistaken—it is worse; for he is ten years older; he has less courage and far more extravagant habits. His creditors harassed him then for hundreds of francs, but to-day they worry him for millions."

"Yes, but he has resources," murmured Léon.

"He had them, it is true; but he has them no longer. No, not one; they are all exhausted. He has no influence to-day, for he has abused and used it for himself, his mistresses, and the first scamps who came to him with well-lined pockets. Not one of his friends would lend him a hundred louis, and his signature is not worth a hundred sous. Do you know how the emperor would reply to his cries of distress? By ten thousand francs a year in quarterly payments! How would he live in that case, he who has never yet been able to make both ends meet. He realizes this fully well, and so he is talking of marrying."

"Of marrying?"

"And why not? You wouldn't give him your daughter if you had one—nor would I; but other people don't think as we do."

"But this man——"

"This man, my dear boy, will give his wife the title of countess, which will stand for a time, and he will open the doors of the Tuileries for her. This man, if his father-in-law is not absolutely notorious, will have him decorated—perhaps elected deputy, or possibly senator."

Jean smiled. "This lawyer believes in parliamentary functions, at all events," he thought.

But Léon did not smile. "Well, then why doesn't M. de Combelaïne marry," he asked, "if his wife's dowry would set him afloat again?"

"That is precisely what I could not find out for some time," answered Roberjot; "but I know now. He dares not——"

"Oh!"

"He dares not, because there is a certain person who has designs on him, and this person knows so many of his secrets that he dares not make an enemy of her. He cannot marry her, nor will she allow him to marry any one else."

"And who is this person?"

"Oh! you know her," answered the advocate, and, after a little hesitation, he added:—"It is Madame Flora Misri—the woman who, while De Combeldaine was throwing money out of the window, picked it up and invested it. She is a shrewd, managing woman, notwithstanding all her affected airs. She is a good accountant, and has managed affairs so well that now when the count is ruined to that degree that he hardly knows where to find twenty-five louis, Flora is wealthy, with fully a million and a half in the hands of her notary."

It was with manifest impatience—the impatience of a man whose wound is touched—that Léon listened. "In that case," he said, "I don't see what possible influence our step can have on De Combeldaine's determination."

The lawyer smiled. "Obstinate, as usual," he rejoined, and then he added, quickly: "But let us go on. Monsieur de Combeldaine is at the end of his tether. A good dowry would save him; but, as I said, he does not wish to marry Flora Misri, and she does not wish him to marry any one else. Of course he meant to do something to get himself out of the mess, and what was it? At all events he is so pressed, he cannot wait, and I believe he would have embarked on some perilous enterprise which would have settled his fate. However, you select just the very moment to call out to him, 'Look out, your enemies are watching you!' Don't you see that he will be prudent now. 'Forewarned means forearmed.'"

Léon was obstinate, but not to the extent of denying tangible evidence. "Excuse me, sir," said he, "I had not looked so far. We have been even madder than I supposed. But now what are we to do? For this is the question I came to ask."

Having finished his breakfast, Roberjot rose from table. "If I were free," he said, "I would go with you, but I have business to attend to; still, I will be with you to-morrow to receive the message from Monsieur de Combeldaine. Try to make Raymond hear reason in the meantime."

This was more easily advised than executed, for, on learning what M. de Combeldaine had said, and that his friends had consulted M. Roberjot, Raymond fell into a violent rage, declaring that it was a terrible thing not to have a friend in whom he could confide. The next day, however, when the lawyer appeared, the young fellow seemed calm, either because reflection had sobered him, or because he was more impressed by Roberjot than he wished to let it appear.

"I am punctual, I hope!" said the lawyer, gaily. "Has any one come?"

"Not yet," answered Léon. And without allowing the advocate time for a rejoinder, the young fellow drew him to an open window, and quickly whispered: "I am troubled about Raymond. I know him. He is quiet, as you see, but it is only because he is meditating some folly in case De Combeldaine persists in his refusal."

"And he will persist," answered Roberjot, "I am certain of that. But re-assure yourselves, my measures are taken. There comes our ambassador I believe."

A brougham drawn by two magnificent horses was just drawing up in front of the house. A stout man alighted, and went in; and a minute later was ushered into the presence of the friends. He was a heavily whiskered man of forty-five, altogether too well dressed, with tight-fitting pearl-gray gloves, which seemed on the point of bursting. "I am the friend of the Count de Combeldaine, gentlemen," he said, as he crossed the threshold, and I come—I come——" But the rest of his words died away on his

lips, and a sudden pallor overspread his countenance. He had seen M. Roberjot near the window. "You here?" he stammered—"you."

"Myself, dear M. Verdale," replied the lawyer, with the most ironical politeness. "I am the friend, the intimate friend, you understand, of M. Raymond Delorge, and I have come to know what Count de Combelaïne's friends have advised him to do."

Raymond, Jean, and Léon were utterly amazed. What connection was there between these two men? Some secret plainly, for the one seemed the submissive slave of the other. Verdale's gay, patronizing air had left him, and his attitude had become most humble. "We have decided," he said, with some little hesitation, "that the count ought not to accept the challenge of M. Raymond Delorge, who, we trust, will understand why this duel is an impossibility. If he should see fit to put certain threats he has made into execution, my friend the count, will have him bound over to keep the peace."

"Very well," rejoined the lawyer, coldly, "we will talk the matter over."

But hardly had Verdale retired, or, rather, fled from the spot, than Raymond's anger burst forth. "He will have me bound over to keep the peace, will he? Well, we'll see. This very evening, at the opera, I'll give him an opportunity."

Léon and Jean thought that the lawyer would give an angry answer, but not at all; he simply walked towards the door, calmly opened it, and there on the threshold, now, stood Madame Delorge.

"My mother!" stammered Raymond, considerably disconcerted.

"Yes, your mother!" said she, advancing to meet him. "Fortunately, a friend has warned her of your folly. Poor foolish boy? Don't you realize that to call M. de Combelaïne out is to acknowledge his innocence. Do men fight with cowardly assassins? To let him cross his sword with yours would be to relinquish all claim on justice. And justice must be done to us, Raymond. Your father must be avenged!"

III.

IN warning Madame Delorge, Roberjot had proved that he well understood Raymond's character. He knew that he himself would have vainly expended time and eloquence in trying to turn Raymond from a design so long cherished, a design which he had come to regard not only as excellent, but practicable. However, his mother's entreaties won from him a solemn promise to relinquish it. "You have done me a sorry favour," he said, a few days later, to Roberjot. "Before interfering, you ought to have learned something of my life. Do you know that since my father's death, never a day has passed without my mother showing me the sword, sealed in its scabbard, which hangs above my father's portrait. 'Remember, my son,' she says, 'that yours is the task and the right to avenge your father.' Do you know that now, after ten years, my father's place is daily laid at our table, and that I never take my seat without my mother's eyes turning to the empty chair, without her saying in a cold, measured tone, 'This chair will always be placed here, Raymond, until justice has been done to us!' Do you know that even my sister—even our old servant Krauss—keeps saying to me, that it is for me to punish the assassin?" Hot tears of rage stood in the unhappy young man's eyes, and it was in a stifled voice that he continued: "With this constant reference to the subject, how could my

imagination remain unexcited? Is it living to be haunted by the spectre of my assassinated father? I had found the means, as I thought, the only means—a duel—and you have prevented it. But in the name of Heaven, tell me what I am to do—for do something I must—and at once? Give me some advice? Ah! I see that you are going to say to me, as my mother said: 'Let us wait!' Wait! And for what—a miracle? Ah! I lack faith in that advice. There are no more miracles, and we shall wait until De Combelaine dies in his bed."

Raymond's despair was increased by the thought that Combelaine and his friends would regard him as a boyish boaster—who talked more than he acted. "How these people will laugh at us!" he said to Léon Cornevin. But De Combelaine did not laugh, as was proved by subsequent events.

On leaving the Polytechnic School, Raymond Delorge had entered *l'Ecole des Ponts et Chaussées*, and was a State engineer by profession. As to Léon, he loathed any employment under government, and therefore connected himself with a railway company, and as his abilities were of a high order and his knowledge very considerable, he was allowed at first to hope for, and finally promised, a situation corresponding with his deserts, and the services he had already rendered to the company. He believed himself, on the eve of obtaining this situation, when one morning the manager sent for him, and in the most embarrassed way, announced that it had been decided, in opposition to his own advice and wishes, to give the position to another candidate. The manager added that he was the more worried as the rival candidate was not clever, and—

"It is unfortunate," interrupted Léon coldly; "but there is no need of any apology."

However, notwithstanding his philosophy, Léon was in reality thunder-struck. The company's decision was all the more extraordinary as the man they had taken was not a graduate of the Polytechnic School—for which establishment railway directors usually have a great weakness. "It is perfectly incomprehensible," he said to his mother, who was more afflicted than himself by his disappointment. However, it was not long before he obtained a key to the mystery. Difficulties were incessantly thrown in his way by the people in whose employment he was, until at last it became clear that they were determined to get rid of him—or, rather, determined to annoy and worry him into forwarding his resignation. But why—why?

"My dear Cornevin," said the chief engineer one day, "you have some enemies among the directors."

"Impossible!" cried Léon.

"But it is so—and if it had not been for our manager, who has bravely stood up for you, you would long since have been grossly insulted!"

On hearing this a ray of light flashed on Léon's mind. However, before aught else, he determined to see M. Roberjot.

"Believe me," said the lawyer, "you must not show fight—your enemy is M. de Maumussy."

"I thought you told me that he and De Combelaine were at daggers drawn?"

"Yes, so they were; but Raymond's imprudent step united them again against the common enemy. Now, as your company solicits a grant, and has need of Maumussy, you must not hesitate a moment, but send in your resignation at once."

Raymond was fairly enraged when he heard of this. "Ah! Why did you not allow me to kill that venomous reptile De Combelaine?" he cried.

Three months had not elapsed since Léon's resignation, when Paris, and in fact all Europe, were startled by an attempt to murder the emperor. An Italian, Felice Orsini, accompanied by two accomplices, repaired in front of the Opera House in the Rue Lepelletier, and tried to kill Napoleon III. by throwing several explosive bombs under his carriage. The emperor escaped, but forty-seven persons were killed or wounded. Strangely enough, the police had taken no steps to prevent this attempt. We say strangely enough, inasmuch as they had been warned that a large number of exceedingly dangerous bombs had been manufactured in London. They had been warned of Orsini's departure for France, with his accomplices, and yet these men were not arrested, but were allowed to remain quietly in Paris for nearly a month. "What on earth were the police thinking of?" remarked the Parisians, when these particulars came to their knowledge; and their astonishment was not unreasonable. Canler, in his memoirs, published the following year, and at once suppressed, formally accused the police of incapacity, negligence, and something even worse. The result was that the prefect of police sent in his resignation. "The least he can do!" muttered the Parisians, who were considerably alarmed for their personal safety. However, their uneasiness took another form when they saw General Espinasse, one of the prime movers of the *coup d'état*, and whose reputation for hardness and brutality was proverbial, called to the head of affairs. "This minister of the interior, with a sabre at his side, is certainly no improvement," said one of the newspapers, for which saying it was promptly suppressed. However, the paper was right, and a few days later a law was passed which armed the government with discretionary powers. Certain people, more imperialist even than the emperor, hastened to express their gratification at this display of greater firmness on the part of the government, which they attested had been far too lenient. One of them even said in a cynical way: "Orsini has done some good; he has shown us a means of getting rid of troublesome people."

That was quite true, for the police made arrests on all sides, without discernment or investigation. It was imagined that their zeal would abate when it had been clearly established that the Orsini affair was not a national conspiracy, but the work of foreigners alone. However, such was not the case. Far from diminishing after Orsini's trial and execution, the number of arrests increased throughout France. There was simply a little more method—that was all. And once more, as in 1852, vessels loaded with suspected persons set sail for Cayenne and Lambessa. Like all liberal-minded people, Raymond Delorge and Léon Cornevin were painfully impressed by so much useless violence, and wondered how it would all end. One morning, they had just risen, when the valet of their friend M. Roberjot was ushered in. He brought a hurried note from his master, and having failed to find a cab, he had run with it all the way to the Rue Pigalle. This is what M. Roberjot wrote to Léon: "Send your brother Jean to Belgium or England on a tour. Let him start to-day rather than to-morrow, this morning rather than this evening."

"Jean is in danger!" cried Raymond, "and yet he seems to have given up dabbling in politics." But Léon shook his head. He did not speak, for he did not wish to hurt Raymond's feelings by remarking that it was no doubt M. de Comberlaine who had devised this means of getting rid of one of them. "Let us hasten and warn Jean!" added Raymond, and at once they started off.

Jean had his studio in a new building on the Boulevard de Clichy. The

concierge, who was also Jean's housekeeper, was standing at her door when the two young men reached it. "Ah! gentlemen!" she cried, "what a terrible business!" Léon's and Raymond's hearts sank within them. Had they arrived too late? "Poor Master Jean has just been arrested," continued the woman, drying her eyes with the corner of her apron. "They have just taken him away in a cab."

Raymond was as white as a sheet, and fairly staggered under the blow. However, Léon shook off his own apprehensions in his wish to comfort his friend. "Let us know all that has happened," he quietly asked.

Several shopkeepers in the neighbourhood who had witnessed the arrest, now crowded forward to listen. "Come into my room," said the woman; "we can be overheard here." And as the young men followed her, she closed the door. "This is how it was," she began; "at day-break five individuals arrived and asked for Jean Cornevin, the artist. I was going to take him his coffee that very moment. These men looked so odd that I had a great mind to say my young gentleman was in the country, when one of them threw open his coat and showed me his tricolour scarf, saying to me: 'No nonsense, now! On what floor is this fellow Cornevin's studio?' My heart leapt to my mouth, and I almost let my coffee fall on the floor. 'He lives on the fifth floor, the door on the right,' I answered. 'Good,' said the one with the scarf, who was a commissary of police, and he walked up the stairs with his men. But he did not tell me to stay behind, so I went too. Ah! if I could only have warned Master Jean! He was as unsuspecting as possible, and was painting in his studio, with his back to the door, which was open on account of the stove smoking. He was so busy that he did not even turn round on hearing the footsteps, but merely asked: 'Who's there?' 'In the name of the law I arrest you,' was the answer. 'Arrest me!' cried Master Jean, and never did I see a man so astonished. 'Why do you arrest me?' 'You will find that out soon enough,' was the answer. 'You have only to follow me now.' You know, gentlemen, how quick Master Jean is. When he heard this rough answer he turned as red as a lobster, and I thought he was going to throw his palette at the man's head. But he reflected in time, and began to dress, while the police looked into every corner and drawer. When he saw this he said with a laugh: 'If you find anything there, please show it to me, won't you?' When he was ready he asked permission to write a note to his mother, but was refused, and then they led him away. There was a vehicle outside; he got in with two of the men, and one of them on the box, and then off they went."

When the woman's story was over the two young men breathed freely, for they remembered that at the time of Jean's first arrest, he had been compromised by the papers and drawings found in his rooms. This time, however, it was clear that nothing had been discovered. "The most important point now," said Léon, "is to discover where my poor brother has been taken."

The woman began to weep. "I did my best, gentlemen," she sobbed—"I was all ears—but I couldn't catch a word. The coachman must have received his orders in advance, for he drove off without a word being said to him."

"But was nothing said to you?" asked Léon.

"No, sir, nothing, except that just as the commissary of police went out he handed me the key, and said I was responsible to master Jean's family for the safety of all the property he left in the rooms."

Léon shuddered. This precaution suggested that Jean might not soon return home.

"Oh ! Jean," murmured Raymond, "dear unfortunate friend."

But Léon was cold and calm again. "Give me that key," he said, to the *concierge*, "we will go up stairs."

At the first glance the truth of the woman's story became apparent. It was evident that Jean had been at work when the police entered, for the paint was not dry on the canvas. His brushes lay on the floor with his palette freshly set that morning, and his tubes were scattered in every direction, many of them having been crushed under the feet of the rough visitors. By the way in which the young artist's working blouse was tossed on the chair, it was easy to divine how hastily he had dressed. In short, on all sides there were traces of the efforts made by the police to discover compromising papers.

"We have not a moment to lose," said Léon ; "we must find out this very day where my brother is."

They thereupon hurried to inform Madame Delorge, who, on hearing the sad news, exclaimed : "I recognize the hand of Combelaïne in this ;" and, less generous than Léon had been, she added to her son, "And this is the result of your senseless provocation."

More exasperated even than all the others, Ducoudray on his side exclaimed : "Why does not De Combelaïne have us all arrested ?"

It was decided that it would be best to keep Madame Cornevin in ignorance of her son's arrest for a few days, for were he to be liberated at once she would be saved an immense amount of anxiety. However, this kind consideration was useless, for Jean's *concierge* had been to see Madame Cornevin, and had told her everything ; and while the friends sat deliberating as to the steps they should take the poor mother came in looking as pale as death but with flashing eyes. "Is this true?" she cried. No one dared answer. "It is true, then—the wretches have taken my son now, as they did my husband! As I came here I was nearly run over by a carriage in which I recognized M. de Combelaïne and Flora Misri, smiling and happy. Oh, my God, it is hard to doubt Thy justice!" And, crushed by grief she sank on to a sofa and burst into tears.

At that moment M. Roberjot's valet arrived with another letter from his master. "At the same time, as I sent a warning to you this morning I sent another to Jean. Alas ! I was myself warned too late, for when my messenger reached the spot Jean had already been arrested. Find out if you can where he was taken. I shall try to ascertain this on my side also."

But in vain for four days did Jean's friends besiege the doors of every jail in Paris. The only intelligence they could obtain came to Léon from an official of the Prefecture of Police, a man who was colder than the iron chain of a well and more discreet than a prison door. "Your brother is in excellent health," he said ; "this is all I can tell you to-day. Come back in a fortnight."

"That is precisely what they said to me," sighed the poor mother, "when I went there to ask for my husband. I shall never see my son again!"

However, on the fifth day after Jean's arrest one of his artist friends came with a letter he had received, and which Jean had addressed to him, fearing that a direction in the name of Cornevin would cause it to be suppressed. This is what he wrote : "I have done my best to obtain permission to write to you, and I am refused. However, a convict with whom I have been talking says that for ten francs he will get a letter posted. I would gladly give a thousand to be certain that he is speaking the truth. I have been at Marseilles since yesterday, and I have never been in better health. Having suspected when they arrested me that I was to take some charming

trip, I provided myself with linen and money—for fortunately I had some money in my rooms. I have reason to believe that this very evening I shall be sent to Guyana. Ah! dearest mother, if I were sure that you were not weeping your precious eyes out I should be delighted with this voyage. Just think of the superb studies I can make for future pictures. Don't be distressed, dear mother; all will come right again. I kiss you again and again."

This tender letter, which was so like Jean in its careless gaiety, calmed Madame Cornevin's grief for the time being, but did not dispel her fears. She pictured her beloved son, living among criminals and condemned to the companionship of convicts. She saw him hurried on board of a ship between a double file of soldiers. She followed him in her thoughts until her tears burst forth. "I shall never see him again!" she cried. However, on the receipt of this letter Raymond and Léon set out for Marseilles, wishing to be near their brother and friend—hoping to see him, and let him know that he was not deserted and forgotten. But they were too late. The vessel in which Jean had embarked had gone two hours. So they were told, indeed, by a young woman whom they met at the docks. She carried a child in her arms, and was sadly watching the horizon. Far off a light cloud trailed across the sky. She pointed to it and said: "That is the smoke, the smoke of the ship." Alas! it bore away her husband, the father of her child. "What will become of me?" she sobbed. "What will become of me and my little one?"

Alas! How many similar complaints rose towards the God of Justice from all parts of France in those grim days of fiendish despotism.

The newspapers were silent. Had they spoken their existence would have been compromised. General Espinasse ruled with a heavy hand, and yet the empire was in reality no stronger than before. The government began to realize that something must be done to arouse the nation from the apathy into which it had fallen; and this something could only be war. The emperor hesitated between two pretexts which offered equal advantages—the redemption of Poland or the freedom of Italy. Italy, served by Cavour, won the day. On the 3rd of May, 1859, the emperor announced to the French nation that he was about to draw the sword in favour of the independence of the Italian people, and that he should not sheath it again until he had freed Italy to the shores of the Adriatic. Since the 1st of January, a war with Austria had been anticipated, and the excitement was very great. This war, impolitic as it was, was welcomed with enthusiasm by all classes. The regiments marched through Paris with colours flying and drums beating, and when, on the 10th of May, the emperor left the Tuileries to drive to the Lyons station, he was welcomed with such acclamations as had never before met his ears, and as he was never to hear again. This day was indeed his one solitary day of popularity throughout his reign.

But Italy was not freed to the Adriatic. After the victory of Magenta—which gave General MacMahon a marshal's baton and the title of duke, and when General Espinasse was killed—after the glorious and bloody fight of Solferino, it was suddenly discovered that the Emperors of France and of Austria, Napoleon III. and Francis Joseph, had met at Villa Franca, and had agreed on the terms of a peace which was signed. Were the promises of the imperial proclamation declaring that Italy should be freed fulfilled? By no means. And this was why the peace enraged the Italians. Why had the emperor abandoned his plans? Some said from fear of revolution—others, that he had yielded to the representations of the great powers, who dreaded

a universal war. At all events, both in Italy and France, the deception was cruel, and the irritation great. The return of the army was very unlike its departure. "What good has this war done us?" people asked, and they commented sharply on the blunders of the campaign, which short as it had been, had fully revealed the weakness of French military organization. The troops, it was asserted, had not been concentrated with fitting rapidity. The arrangements had been faulty in every respect. Sometimes the soldiers were literally without bread to eat; and more than once they had lacked ammunition. The generals, moreover, had not acted in unison, and patriotism had not driven rivalry from their hearts. When peace was signed Marshal Neil and Marshal Canrobert quarrelled so violently that the emperor was forced to interfere, or a duel would certainly have taken place.

However, with his extraordinary pretensions to be the arbiter of Europe, the restorer of the liberties of nations, Napoleon III. could not possibly perpetuate in France the system of repression which had followed the Orsini affair. So, on the 15th of August, 1859, there appeared in the *Moniteur*, a decree which said: "Amnesty full and entire is granted to all persons arrested in virtue of the law on Public Safety."

"Good Heavens!" cried Madame Cornevin, when Raymond told her the news; "I am going to see my boy again."

Jean was living. His health had not suffered, and during his year's absence he had contrived to write to them pretty often. After an interminable voyage he had been landed at the Devil's Island, the smallest of the Salvation Isles, and also the dreariest, as all the trees had been cut down to furnish materials for boats, and to lessen the chances of escape. "For the first time," wrote Jean to his brother, "I feel utterly discouraged when I look at the low sandy beach, swept incessantly by all the winds that blow, where there is not a tree, merely a few scanty shrubs to be seen, and where there are no other signs of civilization but such as are furnished by the various buildings, half forts and half prisons." Fortunately, however, Jean was not of a nature to be easily crushed. "It would please the persons who sent me here too much," he wrote, "and as I have no other way of annoying them, I intend to play them the very bad trick of retaining both my health and my spirits."

He kept his word, and bore up without a murmur under the rough discipline of jailors, and the constant society of criminals. He took pains to say, also, that the unhealthiness of the climate had been greatly exaggerated. "I feel my pulse every morning," he wrote, "I look at my tongue in my shaving-glass. I watch every symptom in my stomach, but all in vain: I cannot discover the smallest ailment. It took me some little time to become accustomed to the food, but I have succeeded. The governor of the island, who is a lieutenant of marines, met me yesterday, examined me from head to foot, and said, in a tone of profound surprise, 'Upon my life! I think you have grown fat.' 'Is that forbidden?' I asked; 'and if it is not, I propose to return to you stouter than when I went away.'"

"What a fellow he is!" cried M. Ducoudray, quite touched by this unconquerable cheerfulness. "I do believe that he could jest on the scaffold."

Jean's situation on the Devil's Island at last improved. For on orders received from Cayenne he was exempted from hard labour, and given a room to himself. He was a prisoner still, but the entire island was his prison—it belonged to him. He had got rid of the odious dormitory; he had a retreat to himself, where he could sit and think and build hopes for

the future. He was at last able to satisfy the aspirations for work which had tormented him for months. And as a proof of this, he wrote to his mother describing the house he lived in, and sent a sketch of it. "You see," he said, "that it is no palace. My floor is beaten earth, my roof is the cover of a huge box; but I have an iron bedstead, a chair, and an unheard-of luxury, a mosquito net, which is the envy of all beholders."

His cheerfulness could not last, however; lassitude and homesickness were taking possession of him, when an unexpected happiness probably saved his life. He had just risen one morning, when the governor of the island came in and told him that, according to orders just received, he was to be sent to Cayenne. Jean knew that this was considered very desirable, and had seen many of his companions leave with joy, but they had had some protecting influence to push them, or else possessed the art of persuasion, while he, on the contrary, knew no one, and was not of a nature to bow down and ask for favours. It was therefore with some distrust that he at first received the news. "Will that be any better?" he asked.

"Be any better," repeated the governor. "Do you not think it will be better to leave the companionship of criminals and enjoy a semi-liberty in the midst of the semi-civilization of a French colony? What a question to ask!"

"But changes don't always bring happiness," murmured Jean.

He was not long, however, in changing his opinion. The sutler at the Devil's Island had been in the habit, for some time past, of selling Jean's drawings at Cayenne. One of them had chanced to fall into the hands of the leading merchant in the colony, who, struck by the talent they displayed, had interested himself in the artist's fate. It was this worthy man who received Jean at the dock on his arrival at Cayenne, "You will come straight to my house," he said; and Jean welcomed so cordially, and treated with such unexpected hospitality, soon recovered his spirits and self-reliance. He had made many plans for the future, when, on September 28th, 1859, the proclamation of amnesty reached Cayenne.

"France! Am I then to see France again?" cried Jean, half mad with joy. And two months later to a day, he held his mother in his arms.

"All our sorrows are forgotten," she murmured, "now that I have you here once more!"

But this was not Jean's opinion. The very night of his return he took his brother and Raymond aside, "Listen, my friends," he said: "I have brought a great joy with me, I believe, from Cayenne. I have brought almost the certainty that our father is not dead!"

IV.

JEAN expected a shout of joy, but his words were received in silence. Léon and Raymond looked at him as if they thought him quite mad. "Do you know what you are saying, my dear brother?" asked Léon, gently.

"Perfectly."

"Then why have you waited until now to tell us this? Why have you not written it?"

"Because certain secrets can't be confided to a letter when one is a prisoner. All letters must be delivered open to one's jailer." And without waiting for the questions which he read in his companion's eyes, he continued, speaking rapidly, "First, I must tell how I learned what I know."

I was settled comfortably with the merchant of whom I wrote, and wanted to buy an easel. I could not find one, and then asked for a workman who could make one.

"I was sent to a man named Nantel who had been transported after the *coup d'état*, and had been long since pardoned; but instead of returning to France, he had married a young girl of the colony, and was making quite a little fortune by his ingenuity in preparing hard-wood roofing, for in Guyana wood takes the place of slates. I found him to be a man about forty, with an intelligent face, and he instantly understood what I wanted. He promised to execute the commission at once, and I gave him my name and address, so that he might bring the easel to me when finished. But instead of writing down the address in a little book he had taken from a drawer for the purpose, this worthy fellow stood looking at me with the strangest expression, 'What on earth is the matter?' I exclaimed.

"'Nothing,' he said, 'only that the name of Cornevin brings back all sorts of recollections to me.' 'Have you ever known anyone of the name?' I asked. 'Yes; a poor fellow exiled like myself in 1851.' At this reply, I felt hope leap in my heart, and I cried out: 'What was the Christian name of the man you speak of?' 'It was Laurent,' answered Nantel.

"'This was conclusive. Chance? no; Providence had led me to this man who had known my father, who had seen him since the fatal day when he was torn away from us, and who could probably tell me something which would enable me to trace him. 'I am the son of Laurent Cornevin,' I said. 'For the last ten years we have moved heaven and earth to find him, and we were finally forced to the conclusion that he was killed during the fatal month of December——' 'No, that is not so,' said Nantel, 'for I was with him at Brest, and then we were together again on the Devil's Island.' I was filled with rage at the thought that my father had been imprisoned in the same spot where I had suffered so much; and at the idea, too, that his feet had trod those rocks where I had sat and dreamed of France for so many dreary hours. But where was he now?' 'Is he dead?' I asked in a trembling voice; 'did he, with all his anxieties telling on him, succumb to the influence of the climate?' 'No,' answered Nantel, 'he tried to escape, and I have always fancied he succeeded; in fact, I subsequently saw one of his companions, who told me he got safely off.'"

Jean's excitement was affecting his listeners. For the first time for ten years a ray of light, feeble enough to be sure, but a certain one, was cast on the darkness and mystery of their past.

But Jean continued: "As you may imagine, I overwhelmed Nantel with questions, whereupon he asked me to follow him into his back shop, and said he must think the whole matter over and would tell me everything he knew. I made him put his story into writing, and he did so and signed it. And in fact here it is. So saying Jean drew from his pocket a roll of coarse paper, covered with writing in an uncultivated hand, and began to read it.

"At the request of Jean Cornevin, artist, exiled to Guyana, I, Antoine Nantel, carpenter, living at Cayenne, write all I know of the history of Laurent Cornevin, swearing at the same time to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. On the 3rd of December, 1851, I was in the Rue du Petit-Carreau, where there was a barricade, and where some fighting had been going on. I was arrested and taken to the nearest station-house. The next day I was sent to Brest. Anxiety and fatigue made me ill, and, on my arrival at Brest, the physician ordered me to the hospital. I had been there a week, when one night I was woke up by a loud noise. A man who was

insensible and covered with blood was being brought in and placed on the bed next to mine. The nurses crowded around him, and I heard one of them say, "If he revives at all I will send for the priest." But he lay unconscious all night; still when the surgeon-in-chief came and looked at him in the morning, he said he could save him. I found out later who the poor fellow was; he had been arrested the same day as myself, but, on reaching Brest, had managed to evade the vigilance of his guardians and get out on the roof of the prison. To do this required marvellous agility and strength. Unfortunately his foot slipped, and he fell from an enormous height on to the road below. His leg was broken, and he was frightfully injured about the head. All the same, however, he soon got better. But in vain did I try to enter into conversation with him; he would only answer me with a yes or a no—if he condescended to answer at all. All day long he would lie in his bed, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling, and his hands clenched. But at night it was a different thing. Then I heard him sob more than once, and mutter: 'My poor wife! my poor children!' This was all so dreadful to me that I asked the matron to change my bed. Of course I was laughed at, but my neighbour was told that he must keep quiet, as he troubled the patients near him. Thereupon the poor fellow looked at me with the saddest eyes in the world, and said, 'I am sorry to have disturbed you.' I had only three louis in the world, but I would gladly have given them to him if I hadn't asked to have my bed changed, and I said to myself, 'What a hard creature I am! Here I am without a human being to regret. No one cares where I am or how I am. And here is this poor fellow with his wife and children left behind him!' I naturally begged my neighbour's pardon—he was No. 23 and I 22—and told him he might sigh and groan as much as he pleased. But after that I never heard a sound, and this was really worse than before.

"One afternoon one of the police inspectors came into the ward. He saw No. 23 warming himself near the stove, so he went up to him and tapped him on his shoulder: 'Ah! my poor Boutin,' he said gaily, 'have you got over your gymnastics?' No. 23 did not reply. 'Are you deaf?' asked the inspector. The man did not speak, and this made the inspector get furious. 'Do you intend to answer me?' he said. 'Yes, when you call me by my right name.' The inspector shrugged his shoulders. 'The same old notion!' he said contemptuously. 'My name is not Boutin,' was the reply.

"'Ah!' said the inspector, 'I think you ought to be tired of that song. Listen to me, take my advice, and give up denying your identity. What on earth is the use of such obstinacy? You are known; you were arrested under the name of Boutin; you were sent here as Boutin, and that is the name inscribed at Brest. Boutin you are, and Boutin you will remain as long as you live.' 'Just as you say,' replied 23. But as soon as the inspector had gone, he turned towards me, and said in a low voice: 'Did you hear?'

"I was vexed, for it was clear that he distrusted me. I spoke to him no more after that, and I found it pretty hard, for we were the only two Parisians, the only two political prisoners—I may say, too, the only two honest men in that great hospital ward. The others were all convicts, and my tongue should have withered in my mouth rather than have addressed them. Time passed on. No. 23 and I were still in the hospital, but one fine morning in February the surgeon, without saying a word to us, signed our papers of dismissal, and the superintendent came in and shouted out: "Nos. 22 and 23 will leave to-day, and sleep to-night on board the transport vessel—the 'Rhône.' Pack your trunks!"

"This was a little joke, for I had been arrested in my shirt sleeves. But 23 started up pale and trembling—'Will you do me a service?' he hastily said. I naturally answered yes, whereupon he rejoined, 'Before we leave here we shall be searched, I presume——' 'I suppose so,' I replied. 'But not in the same way,' said he. 'Your search will be a mere matter of form, but I shall be examined most carefully.' 'Why this difference?' I asked. 'Because,' he answered, 'I am suspected of having about me a thing which I really possess, and which I have hitherto been fortunate enough to keep out of their clutches. Will you take care of it? Will you swear to use all your ingenuity to conceal it, and give it back to me on board the vessel?' I gave him the promise he asked, whereupon he ripped open the waist-band of his pantaloons, and drew out a letter folded into the smallest possible compass. He gave it to me, and, according to his advice, I hid it in the woollen cap I wore. As it belonged to the Administration it would not be taken from me.

"The precaution was a wise one, and No. 23's provisions were fully realized. I was nominally searched; that is, I was made to undress in one room, and go into another, where I was given some clothes belonging to the government. No. 23 was now no longer the man I had seen him—indifferent to all that was going on. His faculties were all awake. Instead of quietly obeying, he fought, so to speak, over every shred. He said his clothes were his own; that no one had any right to take them; and that he would be cut to pieces rather than give them up. In a word, he acted to perfection the part of a man who thinks he is about to lose something most precious. I was almost deceived myself, although I had the letter inside the lining of my cap. Of course he was obliged to yield. He was carried into the next room and dressed in his new clothing by force. I noticed that a man, who had much the look of having just come from the Prefecture of Police in Paris, inspected all these proceedings. That same evening we went on board the transport ship, and I gave 23 his letter. He snatched hold of it with joy, and pressed it to his breast. Then he exclaimed, 'We shall be well out at sea before the brigands will have time to examine every thread of my cast-off garments, and before they find out that they have been cheated.' Then crushing my hands in his, he continued: 'And you, my comrade, what shall I say to you? It is more than life you have given me—it is more than the life of all those who are dear to me. It is my honour you have saved by saving this scrap of paper on which a dying man traced his last words, and intrusted them to me.'

Raymond started to his feet. "Merciful God!" he exclaimed, "is it possible that my father, before he died, had time to write the name of his assassin?" And grasping his friends' hands, he continued: "Oh, friends and brothers, what don't I not owe to you? Your father was sacrificed for my mother and her children. It was because your father was bent on fulfilling the sacred trust of a dying man that he was dragged from prison to prison. O, my friends, how shall ever I recompense this sublime devotion?"

It was Jean who answered. "You owe us nothing, Raymond, but your friendship. Your mother has done everything for us, and we owe to her all that we are—we two men—and my mother and sisters——"

"Our father only did his duty," interrupted Léon, "and poor and humble as was his station, I am proud of being his son."

Jean now resumed his perusal of the manuscript. "All this," continued Nantel, "only inflamed my curiosity, but I dared not ask a question, as it seemed to me that it would be like asking him to pay me, as it were, for the

services I had rendered him by preserving this precious letter. When I say letter, I mean a square envelope, closely sealed, without any superscription, and containing only a small bit of paper. No. 23 had put it into an envelope the better to preserve it. I was very much puzzled, but taking all the precautions I had witnessed into consideration, and remembering the change of name, I made up my mind that 23 was one of the prime-movers in the resistance shown to the *coup d'état*—not one of those instigators who put other poor fellows in front and disappear themselves at the first hint of danger, but one of those who stand forward boldly and drink the wine they have drawn. I, therefore, did not treat him as an equal, but as a superior, and endeavoured to show by my respect and devotion the appreciation I had of his services. He did not notice this for some time, and then he asked what I meant. I told him of course. 'Alas! my poor fellow,' he replied, 'you are very much mistaken. I never took the smallest interest in politics, and my misfortune has nothing to do with it.' But I was not convinced. 'You are exiled on that ground?' I said. 'True,' he replied—'because that was the easiest way of getting rid of me.' 'And why did they change your name?' 'Because they wished to rob me of my identity. My name is Laurent Cornevin—and I'm a person of no importance whatever. I was a mere groom in a stable. But the greatest sometimes tremble before the lowliest.' He passed his hand slowly over his brow, and if to drive away painful thoughts, and then he added slowly: 'I have trusted all this to you, my good Nantel, because you are a worthy man and I respect you, and because, thanks to this paper which you preserved, a certain crime will be punished. But let us never speak of these things again.'

"Cornevin was a very taciturn person, and soon relapsed into his former mood—he hardly seemed to notice anything. The weather was frightful. Our vessel rolled and tipped, and I was deadly sick for a week. On the whole, we were not badly treated. Our food was the same as the sailors', with the exception of their ration of brandy. We had fresh meat occasionally, and wine. At night we were allowed a hammock. We had a good captain. He said to us the day we started: 'So long as you behave well I will grant you every privilege in my power, but at the first sign of insubordination I shall come down heavily on you.' The system was a good one, for all went smoothly. Still we suffered from want of air and exercise, for, as we only went on deck in divisions, each of us could at the most remain there a couple of hours each day. When Cornevin's turn came, he invariably seated himself on a coil of rope, and in spite of rain or sun, wind or cold, there he sat, with his eyes fixed on that side of the horizon where he supposed France to be. One day he seemed sadder than usual, and I tried to cheer him, but he shook his head. 'How can I cheer up,' said he, 'when I think of my wife and five little children. What has become of them? They were dependent on my labour, and when I was taken away they had only sixty-five francs in the house.' At another time, he looked at the water in a way that frightened me. 'What are you thinking about?' I asked. He smiled sadly. 'Don't be troubled Nantel; my life isn't my own,' he said. 'God allowed me to witness certain things, so that I might become the instrument of His justice. I have a task to fulfil—and I shall fulfil it!' These are all the confidences which Laurent Cornevin made to me, and yet I am sure he trusted me. He liked me too, for he offered me his ration of wine very often, saying: 'Drink it; you need it more than I.' He was right in saying so, for all his sufferings had in no degree injured his magnificent physique. One day, when I expressed my

amazement at his superb health, he said that a fixed idea was a splendid preservative, and that he was not sick, because he could not be.

"I was overjoyed when, one day, a sailor told me that in less than twenty-four hours we should sight land, and he was right, for the next morning, when I was on deck, I espied afar off a light-brownish mist, which I was told was Guyana. Finally, there rose two high arid rocks, and then the various islands. At last we cast anchor off the Salvation Isles. Everyone on board the ship was in ecstasies, except Laurent, who sat as usual on his coil of rope, apparently oblivious of everything. Seeing this, I shook his arm. 'Look!' I cried. 'We have arrived!' But he shrugged his shoulders. 'What is there to rejoice at?' he asked.

"True enough, and I recognized the justice of his question when we landed. Nothing was ready to receive us. A single block-house and a store-house stood there. We slept under boughs, like so many savages in the woods, and shivered in the white fog, which is regarded as so unhealthy that it is called the Europeans' winding-sheet. As to food we were not as well off as on board the 'Rhône.' Twice each week a steamer brought us provisions from Cayenne. After answering to the roll-call, night and morning, we were at liberty to wander at will over the island, snare the birds, fish and catch turtles. As my trade had been that of a carpenter, I built a little hut which I shared with my comrade Laurent, in whom I had begun to notice a certain change. He was still taciturn, but a look of resolution had succeeded his earlier seeming resignation. He now talked of his family without a break in his voice, or a tear in his eye. 'By this time,' he said, 'their fate is decided; either God has taken pity on them, or He has forgotten them; in that case they have long since died.'

"I was the more astonished at this change in Laurent as the vigilance with which he was guarded had increased rather than relaxed. He was persistently called Boutin, and he as persistently replied that Boutin was not his name. He was never allowed to make one of the gang which was employed on the vessels which occasionally put into port. Once, however, he succeeded in speaking to a sailor, and asked him to post a letter for him at Cayenne. But this letter was intercepted. It only contained, so Laurent afterwards told me, the words "I am living," and was addressed to a widow in Paris, and signed with his real name. He was taken before the governor, condemned to solitary confinement for fifteen days, with half rations. When I saw him at the end of the fortnight, he said to me: 'I don't blame the governor. He thinks me a dangerous man, for he has been told so. He is a soldier and obeys orders. But the others!'

"Who these others were he did not tell me, but after this his habits changed. Instead of working with me on little articles which we sent to Cayenne for sale, and the proceeds of which naturally improved our table, Laurent spent all his days in the woods, and did not appear until the roll call at six. One night he said to me: 'Nantel, my resolution is taken. I have prepared everything, and to-morrow I make my escape!' I shuddered, for I was well acquainted with the difficulties of the passage past the Devil's Island, where a small boat was sure to be swamped even on the calmest days. But supposing he got past this point safely—what then? He had neither arms or provisions. 'You can't do it!' I cried. 'I shall try, at all events,' was his cool reply; 'and more than that, I shall succeed. God, who uses me for His ends, will protect me!'

"It was by no means the first time that Cornevin had expressed the conviction of having been chosen by Providence for an especial mission.

I, however, had always turned the subject when he said such things, as I did not like the glitter in his eye. I really feared that his reason would be shattered by the trials he had endured. But that night I determined to be frank, and I told him that he took his fancies for realities, and I reminded him of the many attempts at escape from this island, not one of which had succeeded. 'Comrade,' he said, 'I thank you. I know very well that I can only hope to escape by a miracle, but cease to oppose me—the miracle will be performed. A voice tells me so!' I honestly believed that my companion had gone mad. Alas! he was not the first whose reason had fled. Others among us also spoke of the voices they heard. I was tempted to go to the governor, but I concluded that treason under any excuse, or with any motive, is still treason. I decided that if I could not restrain Laurent unaided, he must be allowed to accomplish his destiny. He then told me that he had built a boat, and he intended to row out to sea, where he hoped to find some vessel which would take him on board. The next day he showed me what he called his boat. Good heavens, it was a mere raft, and so imperfectly put together, that the first wave would tear it asunder! Two long branches flattened at the end were the oars.

"And is it in that thing," I asked, 'that you intend to brave the waves?' On hearing this he lost patience. 'Enough!' he cried, 'I won't hear one word more either of advice or remonstrance.'

"However, I could not let him start like this. I set to work in the woods, and in a week I built a boat which would stand in fair weather. The next Sunday all was ready, and what a Sunday it was! for my companion was to leave on the morrow. Each time I looked at him tears filled my eyes, but he was gay enough, anxious only on one score—respecting that letter which he cherished with so much care. He put it into a small vial and hung it round his neck. The night came—we both answered to the roll call, and as usual retired to our hut. We waited there awhile, and then Cornevin said: 'Come—it is time.' We started off. Certain precautions were necessary, for we were not allowed to roam over the island at night time. It was about eleven o'clock, and the night was very dark. The tide was going out among the rocks, and, as usual, the water seemed very agitated. Heavy yellow waves broke with a great noise on the pebbly beach, but on looking out further I saw it was as smooth as a billiard table. 'Laurent,' I said, 'think well—it is not yet too late.' 'Help me to launch the boat,' was his reply. It was a difficult thing to do, but we succeeded nevertheless, and my fragile craft at last floated beside a rock. Laurent pressed my hands. 'As long as I live,' he said, 'I shall remember what I owe to you.' 'Poor fellow,' I thought, 'you will not have many hours to remember this.'

"However, he pushed off his boat. Both the wind and the current were in his favour. For more than an hour I stood there, and then I climbed a high rock. The moon had risen, the sea glittered like a mirror of silver, and half a league away I saw a tiny black spot—it was Cornevin's boat. 'He will row all night,' I thought, 'unless submerged by some wave, and in the morning his strength will have gone. Then his provisions will be exhausted, and he will die of hunger!' I had just said this when, all at once, I saw a light cloud, as it were, on the horizon, a cloud which seemed to be approaching the island. A hope was aroused in my breast. If it were a ship! I concentrated all my attention on this cloud, and soon doubt became impossible. It was really a ship under full sail coming directly towards the island. I had laughed at Laurent. I had thought his faith in

Providence utter madness, and now I believed. It seemed to me that I was a witness of one of those startling miracles which sometimes confound the reason and crush the pride of man. Was it not a miracle, indeed, to see a ship in these waters? for during my year of sojourn on the island the only ones I had seen were those belonging to the French government and connected with the penal colonies. I shuddered! What if this vessel were one of these! Laurent, in that case, would be brought back in irons and then sent to Cayenne. My next agony was, had my comrade seen this ship which I distinguished so clearly from the height at which I stood. I looked at the tiny black speck which, as well as I could judge, was now half way between the island and the vessel. Laurent had hoisted his sail, for the appearance of the boat had changed, and it looked like a gigantic sea-bird. However, I dared wait no longer, for I was half a league from camp, and day was near at hand. Fortunately I got back safely.

“‘Boutin! Boutin! Boutin!’ read the guard at the roll call. Naturally there was no reply, whereupon the guard turned to me. ‘Where is your comrade?’ he asked. I replied that I did not know; that he had left me the night before, and I had not seen him since. As nothing more was said to me just then, I got away as soon as I could, and returned to the rock from which I had watched Laurent’s departure. I had been away three hours, and now it was in vain that I scanned the horizon—I could see nothing. I returned to the camp hardly expecting to hear anything of my comrade. But that is precisely what did happen. The steamboat running from Cayenne to the island was unloading; I was sent down to assist, and I heard one of the sailors say that he had seen an American brig off the island that morning. She had been to Demerara for repairs after a terrible gale. ‘So,’ I said to myself, ‘Laurent is free at last, and can use that letter which cost him so dear.’ I was so happy at this idea that I was perfectly indifferent to the threats uttered that night by the guard, who was furious when no Boutin appeared at roll call. It was on the following afternoon that the truth became known. I was just eating my dinner when one of the guards burst in like a bombshell, and in a furious tone commanded me to go with him to the governor. I obeyed, but I affected great astonishment at being summoned in this way. ‘Just wait a bit,’ was the guard’s grim rejoinder. ‘You will soon be polished off!’

“The governor’s face was anything but reassuring, and I saw at once that there was trouble in store for me. ‘Where is Boutin?’ he cried. As I persisted in saying that I did not know, he declared he would make me know, and ordered two soldiers to march me down to the shore where Laurent’s boat lay. It had been washed up by the waves, and two soldiers had discovered it. My heart sank within me! So my poor comrade had been drowned after all. But I was comforted presently on finding that the boat was in good condition. The sail and provisions alone were missing. Was not this a proof that Laurent had been taken on board of the American brig? ‘Now,’ said the governor sternly, ‘will you continue to deny the part you have played in Boutin’s escape?’ I did continue to deny it, of course, but as I was the only carpenter on the island my work betrayed me. I was sent to prison, and kept there a long time. Fortunately carpenters were in demand at Cayenne, and at last I was sent there. The next year I married. I heard nothing of Laurent Cornevin for a long time; but one evening, while I was in a *café* at Cayenne, I heard an American sailor relate how once in passing the Salvation Island his ship had picked up a French convict. I took this sailor aside, and discovered that the convict in question

must have been Laurent Cornevin, and that he had worked his passage to Talcahuana in Chili on board the brig."

V.

JEAN CORNEVIN now rolled up Nantel's manuscript and looked at his brother and Raymond. "Well?" he asked.

They did not answer. They had expected something more than this abrupt termination, and they were disappointed. "Is that all?" inquired Raymond.

"All, Nantel has not written one word more," said Jean, and in answer to his companions' repeated questions, he added impatiently: "Can't you see that this narrative has cost Nantel a prodigious effort. Don't you think that if he had known any more I should have elicited it from him. For two whole months I teased Nantel with questions, hoping that in his narrative he had forgotten some petty detail that would be of value to me. No, he knows nothing more than is written there." So saying, Jean rose. "I consider you basely ungrateful," he resumed, "that instead of rejoicing at these unexpected revelations, you merely deplore the absence of more. Look at this. Let us see where we are. Our suspicions have become certainties; we were convinced that the general was assassinated in the presence of a witness. Now we are sure of it. Yesterday, Léon, you thought your father was dead—now you know that if he bears any name it is that of Boutin. We know he did not die at Cayenne, but that in 1853 he landed in safety at a small town in Chili, having a letter written by General Delorge in his possession."

But Léon here spoke: "I do not wish to differ with you, dear brother, but the very story which to you proves our father's existence, to me proves his death. Let me explain, and you will see I am right. In 1853, our father was free and in Chili; that was ten years ago. Why have we not heard a word from him since? If you admit that during these ten years he has forgotten us—my mother and ourselves—his plans of vengeance, and France, I will say, 'Yes, it is possible he still lives! But not otherwise.'"

However, Jean was not convinced. "I see what you mean," he answered, "but I have faith, the faith that Nantel had when he saw the vessel approach from the distant horizon to rescue our father from his frail boat. I know he is living. God has spared his life for His own good purposes."

Who was right? Raymond himself could not decide, but he leaned toward Jean's belief. However, the young men decided to say nothing to their mothers until they had seen M. Roberjot, who listened attentively to Nantel's narrative. He said little, but it was plain that he adopted Jean's view. He proposed to take certain steps at once; the first being to apply to the police for information respecting Boutin. A week later he received the following note from the Prefecture de Police: "Boutin (Louis), thirty-four years of age, born in Paris. Seized with arms in his hands behind a barricade in the Rue du Petit-Carreau, on the 4th of December, 1851, and sent to the Conciergerie. Sent to Brest on the 21st of December, under the custody of Inspector Brichant. Reached Brest on the 22nd. Admitted to the hospital the same day, having been injured in attempting an escape. Sailed on board the transport vessel 'Rhône' to Guyana. Died on the 29th of January, 1853, while attempting his escape on a boat of his own construction. Body not found."

This note was absolute proof of the accuracy of Nantel's narrative. If it had been equally easy to prove that Boutin and Cornevin were one and the same, the Count de Combelaïne might well have trembled. Two other points, moreover, were made clear by this note: first, that the government had no idea that Cornevin had escaped with his life, and that M. de Combelaïne fancied himself forever rid of the witness of his crime. However, these results were not enough for Jean, whereupon Léon proposed to write to the French Consul at the small Chilian town, where Cornevin had landed. "Take care," said Jean. "Remember that a single inconsiderate step may arouse the suspicions of our enemies, and put them on the track. Remember that if our father be living this will expose him to new dangers." On another occasion he remarked, "Well, I will consent to believe in my father's death if you will have it so; but in that case, where is the letter Nantel spoke of? Don't you feel certain he must have confided it to some one to deliver to us?"

Jean's manner was at the same time so mysterious, that Léon remarked, "I am quite convinced, that my brother is about to do something very rash."

Indeed a week later Jean announced that he meant to start for Chili at once. "You are mad!" said Léon.

"Not quite," answered the young painter; "only I should become so if I were to remain here in this state of uncertainty."

It was useless to argue with Jean, as Léon well knew; but he thought he had one irrefutable objection. "And the money?" he asked.

"I have a thousand crowns."

"And do you think of going to Chili with that trifle?"

"No, I intend to ask you and Raymond for more."

"And suppose we refuse?"

Jean shrugged his shoulders. "In that case I shall take the MSS. to Madame Delorge and our mother, and I am quite sure that when they know what I want to do they will give me money enough."

This was so perfectly true that Léon and Raymond felt conquered. "Do as you choose," they said; and as their united purses did not supply the requisite amount, they applied to M. Ducoudray, who enthusiastically exclaimed; "Jean is right, and if I were not so old I would go too." And he agreed to obtain Madame Cornevin's consent.

"It would be a great comfort," he said to her, carelessly, "if Jean took a notion to travel. There is a great deal of political excitement just now, and if he stays in Paris, reckless as he is, he will be in trouble by the end of the month."

The very next day the poor mother urged her son—the son from whom she had been so long separated—to go away again, and at the end of the week all preparations being completed, Léon and Raymond saw him embark at Bordeaux for Valparaiso. M. Roberjot had duly bidden him good-bye, saying: "Come back soon, Jean, and bring proofs with you. It seems to me that I already feel the first puffs of the tempest which will sweep away the empire, and the Maumussys and the Combelaïnes, the Princesses d'Eljonsen, the Verdales, and all the Drs. Buiron, into the bargain."

Had many persons heard the honourable deputy talk in this fashion they would have shrugged their shoulders and said, "Nonsense!" and apparently with reason, for never had the empire seemed stronger. The political machine wound up on the 2nd of December, continued to work with apparent smoothness. Paris was still the city of *fêtes* and pleasure. Gold

flowed freely; and those on the summit of the social ladder vied in squandering money in the most foolish and reckless way. The luxury was simply prodigious. Any foreigner who on a fair spring afternoon drove through the Bois de Boulogne returned home bewildered and dazzled by the magnificence of the display, just like the simple Switzer who wrote: "Paris is the city of millionaires! All the inhabitants have horses and carriages."

However, war with Mexico had just been declared, and there were sundry misgivings despite the pompous phrases with which the government tried to justify and exalt this strange expedition. If a questioning voice was raised in the chamber of deputies, it was quickly silenced. The newspapers had a great deal to say, but dared not say it. And yet the public knew—or thought they knew—the real motives of this adventurous campaign. They talked of imprudent speculations and wholesale robbery, and the Republicans declared that the real aim of the Mexican war was to insure the payment of an usurious interest to influential personages who had purchased claims on the Mexican government for a mere song. In fact, the French army was to do bailiffs' work—and for the advantage of whom? The names of several of the creditors were given, and even the amount of their probable profits. It was affirmed that M. de Maumussy would have a share of the cake, as well as De Combelaine and the Princess d'Eljonsen; and those who heard these tales marvelled at the corruption of the times. If this expedition to Mexico had proved a success, it would have been a vastly different matter: for France pardons everything to success. But, undertaken by folks who knew nothing of the country they proposed conquering, nor of the men with whom they would have to fight, this fatal war could only lead to disaster. The very beginning was a check, soon repaired, it is true, and gloriously avenged—but afterwards? The Archduke Maximilian of Austria was sent to Mexico, and proclaimed emperor against the will of the Mexicans. The small French army became lost in an immense stretch of country, and suddenly France learned that, acting on the pressure of the United States, the Imperial government had decided to evacuate Mexico. Then came the retreat and embarkation of the French army under the command of Bazaine. The dénouement of the drama was not far off. Having vainly begged the Emperor Napoleon for men and money, the Empress Charlotte of Mexico went mad; and then one morning the news came of Maximilian's execution.

The shame of having been powerless to prevent this execution was all that the empire derived from the Mexican war. As to what it cost France in men and treasure no one knew until much later. "But it was a glorious idea—the greatest of the whole reign," repeated certain officious persons over and over again. It may have been so; only while this beautiful idea was being put into execution, Prussia had gained the battle of Sadowa and crushed Austria. True enough, it was said that the empire had been promised a compensation by Count von Bismark. "The new-born power of Prussia should not alarm us—quite the contrary," said one of the orators of the day in the chamber of deputies.

"Quite the contrary, is very well said," wrote M. Roberjot to Raymond Delorge. "However, I am not an optimist, and I think I see the beginning of the end."

VI.

RAYMOND Delorge and Léon Cornevin had left Paris, shortly after Jean's departure for Valparaiso, M. Roberjot having said to them :

"Go without uneasiness—I will constitute myself your faithful correspondent, and if anything occurs which renders your presence here necessary, I will telegraph to you."

And he kept his word, no small merit, with a man as frightfully busy as himself. He wrote daily to the exiles, as he called them, and exiles was the word, for it was not of their own free will that they left Paris. But life is full of inexorable necessities, and when a man's without a fortune he is compelled to submit to the exigencies of a profession to earn his bread and butter. This was why Léon Cornevin had started in search of a new field of labour, directly after resigning his position at the railway company. He was by no means exacting—his ability was remarkable—he was highly recommended, and yet, such was the crush in Paris, that every corner was filled. He could find literally nothing in the city or its environs. Tired of struggling, he at last resigned himself to accepting a position on a Spanish railroad, and started for Madrid.

As for Raymond, he had been sent to Tours by the Minister of Public Works to assist in studying the means of preventing the periodical inundations of the Loire. And the young man was delighted by the change. He was for the first time freed from the fixed idea which had filled his life since boyhood. He seemed to see unknown horizons opening wide before him. He realized, so to speak, that he was young, and that he was only twenty-seven, and that he had had no youth.

The inspector whom he was to assist proved to be the best of men. He was the Baron de Boursonne, the last survivor of one of the oldest and best known families in Poitou. It is true that nothing annoyed him more than to hear himself addressed by his title. "I am Father Boursonne," he used to grunt in a tone which was by no means paternal. A former pupil of the Polytechnic School, M. de Boursonne, had once espoused the Saint Simon doctrine, and had spent a handsome fortune in experimenting in that direction. However, while his former associates had all succeeded in finding honourable and lucrative posts, the baron had been kept in the background and given subordinate positions, far below his abilities. Still his heart had not been soured or hardened by this injustice, but his temper had become exceedingly irritable. Folks said of him : "A good man, no doubt! An honest man, too—but an oddity!"

The truth is that he took infinite pains to appear precisely the contrary of what he really was. An aristocrat in the best sense of the word, with a high-cultured, sensitive mind, he affected the language of a peasant and the most absolute cynicism. One of his greatest delights was to wear the shabbiest garments in the world as if to furnish a contrast to his noble, refined countenance. Raymond, when he first called upon the inspector, was dressed to pay a morning visit, and the old gentleman looked at him for a moment in astonishment. "Well! well! Monsieur Delorge," he said, "you have a good tailor—but isn't it a great bore to be dressed like that?" And as Raymond, disturbed by this astounding reception, did not know what to say, M. de Boursonne continued : "Come on! We will go and see our workmen." Then without giving Raymond time to change his clothes he

dragged him to the banks of the Loire, and seemed to take especial delight in seeing the young man bespattered with mud from head to foot, and wet up to his knees.

Despite this malicious pleasantry, however, and several other mild practical jokes in the same style, Raymond had not been with the baron a week without detecting the real man under the rough envelope and recognizing how worthy he was of esteem and affection. On his side, M. de Boursonne conceived a very hearty liking for the young engineer, and chose him as his chief assistant in his studies. The plan which M. de Boursonne had formed, in view of curbing the inundations of the Loire, soon compelled him to leave Tours and establish himself in the centre of operations. He at first chose Saumur for his headquarters. And Saumur, with its wooded heights, its old château, its islands, white houses, and spreading fields was very charming.

Unfortunately, on the very day when the baron arrived in search of a suitable lodging, he was walking along with his nose in the air, when he was nearly knocked over by a party of pupils from the cavalry school, who dashed madly down the street. "There are too many soldiers here for me," he said to Raymond. "We will go somewhere else!"

They next tried Rosiers, and remained there. Not because this little town is one of the prettiest mirrored in the blue waters of the Loire, nor because the hills of Saint Mathurin have irresistible attractions, but because the inn of the Rising Sun proved scrupulously clean; because Bérú, the innkeeper, gave a pretty room to the baron and a comfortable one to Raymond; because this same innkeeper also turned out to be a wonderful cook, and had some excellent wine in his cellar. And, moreover, it was the end of September, there were plenty of partridges in the vicinity of Rosiers, and M. de Boursonne, despite his years and near-sightedness, was an unwearying sportsman.

It was a Saturday when the worthy baron reached Rosiers and installed himself at the Rising Sun, with his suite of draughtsmen and engineers.

A week later he and Raymond could truly assert that they were as well acquainted with the environs as any man in the provinces. They had seen all there was to see, from the Roman camp at Chênehutte, the castle-keep at Trêves, and the church of Cunault, to the Celtic remains at Gennes and the Fountain of Avort; from the terraced gardens sloping down to the Loire to the high perched Manor of Ville Haudry, once so magnificent, but so neglected since the count's marriage with Mademoiselle Rupair.* After all this sightseeing, M. de Boursonne and Raymond went to their work—which was work indeed, for it consisted in tracing out a vast system of dikes, reservoirs and canals which it was calculated would make the hitherto disastrous inundations of the Loire a positive benefit to the dwellers on the banks.

The baron and Raymond generally breakfasted early, and went off for the day with a basket of provisions prepared by Bérú himself on the previous evening. At sunset they turned their faces homeward, and dined together at the Rising Sun, in a little private room, the windows of which looked out on the highroad. Then the baron lighted his pipe. Raymond smoked a cigar, and they sat talking and playing cards until ten o'clock. Sometimes an old artillery officer, who also usually dined at the inn, joined them. He,

* See "The Gilded Clique," by Emile Gaboriau.

too, had been a pupil at the Polytechnic School, and his good qualities and advanced opinions had won M. de Boursonne's admiration.

A few days elapsed thus in peaceful monotony, when one morning, while the baron and Raymond were waiting for Bérú to bring in breakfast, they heard a great clatter of horses' hoofs over the highway. M. de Boursonne, who was curiosity itself, looked out of the window. "The deuce!" he cried. "Come here, Delorge."

Raymond complied. A dozen or fifteen horses were passing along the road, all of them superbly caprisoned, and led by servants in long English vests and high boots.

"What's all this cavalry?" asked the baron of Master Bérú, who at this moment came in with a dish in either hand. "Is there to be a circus at Rosiers?"

But the innkeeper was quite shocked by the suggestion, and he answered in a dignified way: "I fancy, sir, that you did not notice the coronet on the saddle-cloths."

"A coronet! Ah! I beg the coronet's pardon. Delorge, look, your eyes are better than mine." And he put up his glasses. "Yes, to be sure," he said; "Bérú is right. But what does that prove?"

The innkeeper bowed with considerable solemnity, and replied: "It proves that the horses belong to the duchess."

The old baron started as if a wasp had stung him, and, in a tone of comical surprise, exclaimed: "Good heavens! Can it be that we have a duchess in this neighbourhood, and Bérú never told us of it?"

"Sir," replied the innkeeper, "she does not usually live in the country."

"Ah! I breathe once more."

"She resides in Paris, but she generally spends a month here at this season."

"And what is the name of your duchess?"

Bérú straightened himself up. "Maillefert—Duchess de Maillefert," he replied.

"Then," said Raymond, "she is the owner of that château I saw on the road from Gennes to Trèves."

"Precisely."

The baron had taken his seat at table, and while he went on eating he said: "We hear of the duchess, but tell us something of the Duke—What the deuce is the name?"

"Maillefert, your honour, Maillefert."

"Who is the duke?"

"He is dead, your honour."

M. de Boursonne poured out a glass of wine, "*De Profundis!*" he murmured. And when he had drained his glass: "You hear, Delorge," he said, "this duchess is a widow. The next question is, has she a heart to conquer? Come, Bérú, tell us some more. Is she young?"

"Young! That depends."

"What do you mean by that oracular reply?"

"I mean to say, your honour, that when you see her passing by, superbly dressed, no one would think her more than thirty—only—"

"Well?"

"She must be double that age, for she has children who are as old as that."

"Indeed," cried the baron. Any one who did not know him would have thought he was highly interested. "Children!" he exclaimed; "grown up children! And how many has she?"

"Two. A son, Monsieur Philippe, who has been called the duke ever since his father's death; a handsome young fellow though somewhat pale. He rides about on horseback and drinks like a fish. And then there is one daughter. Mademoiselle Simone."

"Simone!" repeated the old gentleman. "That is a very nice name."

"Do you think so? Well, if I had a daughter I shouldn't call her Simone; but, then, there is no accounting for tastes. They have a mania in that family for giving that name to the girls, in memory of one of their grandfathers, who was quite famous, at least so I've heard. Still the name seems the loveliest in the world when you know the young lady who bears it——"

"Do you hear that, Delorge?" said the baron.

The interruption apparently annoyed Bérú. "Well," he added, "she may not be any prettier than other girls, but she's better than any of them. And if you go into some of the houses of the poor round about here, sir, you could hear all about her."

"Indeed! Then Mademoiselle Simone is very charitable when she is here for the month?"

"Mademoiselle Simone never goes away, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

"It's odd, sir, isn't it? But they pretend that mother and daughter don't get on well together. So Mademoiselle Simone lives at Maillefert all the year round, while her mother and brother live in Paris. It can't be very gay for a girl of twenty to live alone in this big deserted château with no other society than her English governess, who is thinner and stiffer than a stick, as yellow as butter, with tearful eyes, and a nose as red as my own."

M. de Boursonne had now just finished breakfasting. He rose to his feet, and as he lighted his pipe he said: "All the same, I should have liked a circus. It would have been an amusement."

Bérú smiled discreetly. "I think," he said, "that the duchess's arrival will prove more amusing to you gentlemen than any troop of mountebanks could have been."

"And how, pray?"

"Because she likes excitement. She never comes alone, but always has a number of stylish young men and ladies with her. And they hunt and fish, dine and sup, dance and have fireworks—and, in short, keep up one continual *fête* by night and day."

At this moment M. de Boursonne caught sight of his servant standing at the door with a basket of provisions. "Tell me some more this evening," he said to Bérú; and addressing Raymond, he added: "It is time for us to set to work, my boy." Whereupon he left the room, leaving the innkeeper in a high state of displeasure at being so unmercifully cut short in his gossip.

As the old engineer strode along the embankment fringing the Loire, he muttered: "What singular people we French are! Now, here is this Bérú, who prates of equality, and who, as soon as the duchess arrives, falls into a fever of adoration. He is a democrat, he says, but he would give his inn and all his saucepans to hear himself called Monsieur de Bérú." The baron paused for a word of approbation from Raymond, but the young fellow was occupied with very different thoughts. So he continued: "This family is a good one—there is none higher than the Mailleferts. It is one of the very few remaining in France, it is of the pure old stock; it is connected with the Sairmeuses, the Montmorencys, and the Champdoces."

At this point he stopped to draw a long breath; and then he exclaimed—"Raymond!" The young man started.

"Upon my word," resumed the baron, "you look as if you had fallen from the skies! What on earth are you thinking of?"

"Of nothing, sir, I'm afraid."

"Ah! Suppose I told you that you were thinking of Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert?"

Raymond coloured like a school-girl. "Indeed, sir," he replied, "why on earth should I think of a girl I never saw, and whom in all probability I never shall see."

"I don't know about that," answered the baron. "Besides, when I was your age, the few words we have heard from Bérú would have kindled my imagination respecting her. What a strange sort of life she must lead, thus deserted by her family!"

"Pshaw!"

"Why 'pshaw?' I should like to see you alone in that huge *château* *tele-à-tete* with the English governess. How is it that she isn't married? She ought to be. Unless I am greatly mistaken, these people are as rich as Jews. They have an estate in the Loire Inférieure—a piece of property which is larger than the Republic of Saint Marino, and the Principality of Monaco united. The island of Noirmoutiers was once theirs. What on earth is the reason why this little girl isn't married!" He walked on a few steps in silence, and then exclaimed: "Perhaps she is deformed—or she may be horribly ugly, humpbacked, lame, bald, or deaf. Who knows? No; that fool of a Bérú would have said so."

"Besides," said Raymond, quietly, "a young girl, as rich as you describe is never ugly."

The old engineer burst out laughing. "True, my boy—true! Well, then go ahead and weave your romance. You have all the accessories—the rivers, the hills, the woods, and an old castle. What a lovely framework for a love adventure! Do you have dreams? Well, let me tell you, here is a new sleeping beauty waiting for prince Charming to come and wake her."

"Unfortunately I am no prince," said Raymond, laughing.

"True, my dear fellow. You have that immense advantage, and I congratulate you heartily on your lowly station. You are young, and a pupil of the Polytechnic School."

"And poor."

"For the present, yes. But you have a future before you. The family that would not open its arms to you would be difficult to suit. It seems to me that Madame de Maillefert cares precious little for her daughter."

Raymond shook his head. "It is an outrageous thing," he answered, "to leave her here in this way."

"It is very strange, certainly. I really feel quite desirous of making the acquaintance of this Duchess de Maillefert. But you, Delorge, must know her."

"I! Why should I know her?"

"You are a Parisian."

"In one sense I am, of course; but——"

"In a sense which must have caused you to meet the duchess in society."

However, they had now reached the scene of their operations, and in his usual hasty fashion the baron gave his orders, and put his men to work.

For Raymond and the old engineer not to know anything of the Duchess

de Maillefert even by reputation, showed that they neither of them went into society, and were quite ignorant of what occurred in the highest circles of the Second Empire. They must have never read the newspapers—which were full of her name. The duchess was an intimate friend of the Viscountess de Bois d'Ardon, and the young Duchess de Maumussy—she was a rival of the Baroness Trigault and of the celebrated Sarah Brandon, Countess de la Ville-Haudry; she was in fact the leader of the seven or eight women who enjoyed the enviable and precious privilege of filling the pages of society journals. There was not a gilded youth in Paris who did not know her from having seen her in the Bois de Boulogne—at the races, and the opera, at the seaside, and at Baden-Baden—at skating clubs, and shooting matches—everywhere, in short, where there was noise, display and a crowd. She spent, it was said, more than a million francs per annum. Van Klopen, the celebrated man milliner—that impudent Hollander who for ten years had been the arbiter of feminine elegance—Van Klopen, who said, “my dear” to the fashionable beauties he served, declared indeed that the Duchess de Maillefert was his very best customer. If misfortune had overtaken her the newspaper reporters ought, by good rights, to have clubbed together and allowed her a pension, for during years they had netted large sums by describing her wonderful toilettes, her equipages, horses, and eccentricities, and by repeating the clever sayings that fell from her lips. They had described how she supped at the Moulin Rouge, how she drove down the Champs Elysées with a cigar in her mouth, and how, having had a dispute with a cabman, she stunned him with a torrent of slang as pure as anything that could have been heard in the lowest part of Paris.

However, the baron and Raymond spoke no more of her that day; in fact, they had forgotten her, when on their way home in the evening two capacious carriages going towards the railway station passed them on the high road. “Ah!” said the baron, “the duchess comes to-night, it seems—her carriages are now going to meet her, I fancy.”

Indeed, when they reached the Rising Sun they found the innkeeper looking for them, so as to be able to inform them. “The duchess arrives by the seven o'clock express.” The worthy man was radiant as he spoke, and his round face shone like his sign.

“We saw the carriages,” answered the baron, “but we were surprised not to see Mademoiselle Simone in one of them.”

“Yes, its odd enough,” said the innkeeper, “a young girl who hasn't seen her mother for months, ought to hasten to meet her!” Raymond, whom the baron was watching out of the corner of his eye, was listening attentively. “But it is always like that,” continued the innkeeper; “I have heard that mademoiselle would very much prefer it, if her mother and brother never came to Maillefert at all. Accustomed as she is to her solitary life—living like a cloistered nun—it must bewilder and frighten her, to see such a crowd of people, and hear so much noise all at once. She must feel like an osprey suddenly let loose in the sunlight, and so she gives the company the cold shoulder. Monsieur Casimir, the major-domo, tells me that while there has been company at the château during the last two years she has not set foot outside her own room.”

“And the duchess yields to these caprices?”

“She can't prevent them, for Mademoiselle Simone, saint as she is, has a will of her own. And perhaps she's right in a way—for the month the duchess spends here is a pretty costly one.”

“Pshaw!” said Raymond; “the Maillefert family is wealthy.”

"I don't know about that!" muttered Bérú, "I don't know about that." And drawing closer to Raymond and the baron, he added in a low, mysterious voice, "You never know where you are with these great fortunes! But I do know one thing, that the duchess has been selling property."

"You can't mean it!"

"I do, indeed. You know the beautiful farms in the valley on the way to St. Mathurin—well, they once belonged to the Maillefert estates; but last winter the agent cut them up into small lots and sold them. I bought a patch for a couple of thousand crowns, myself." But, the innkeeper suddenly checked himself and listened. The sharp, shrill whistle of a locomotive could be heard. "There's the train," he cried, "and in five minutes the duchess and her party will be at the station."

The baron laughed that peculiar laugh which prevented people from knowing whether he were speaking in jest or in earnest. "Well, Master Bérú," he said, "I congratulate the Maillefert family on having a devoted adherent and a faithful servant in you."

This did not please the innkeeper, for he drew himself up in his white vest, and in his most dignified manner replied: "I am not the servant of any one!"

Raymond laughed aloud.

"Excuse me, dear Master Bérú," said the baron, gravely. "I fancied on seeing your delight——"

"I was simply pleased, sir, because the arrival of the duchess makes business lively. For instance, her major-domo and the young duke's valet come here a great deal——"

"What an honour!" interrupted the baron, who was growing tired of the amusement afforded him by studying the worthy innkeeper. "Are we to have no dinner to-night?" he asked; "or must we fast in order to honour the duchess's return?"

Suddenly recalled to his duties, the innkeeper felt ashamed of his chatter and rushed from the room. His voice was soon heard in the passage crying: "Madame Bérú, bring the gentlemen their dinner."

The gas was lighted when the Baron de Boursonne and Raymond took their seats at table. As they partook of some excellent soup, the baron exclaimed: "That fool of a Bérú is quite a character." And then hearing a sudden grating of wheels, he added with affected solemnity: "The duchess has certainly arrived!"

Her carriage seemed indeed to have stopped before the inn. A strange voice could be heard in the vestibule, a thin, sharp voice at once imperious, and affected in tone. "Bérú," said its possessor; "Bérú, where the deuce are you? Bring lights here instantly—my servants have forgotten the lanterns. And bring a glass of water to my mother!"

At this moment the door of the dining-room was thrown open, and a young man of about twenty-five came in with his hat on his head, a cigar between his teeth, and a glass in his eye.

"That must be the young duke," said the baron in a low voice.

He was not mistaken, M. de Maillefert was of medium height, thin, or rather emaciated, with a hollow chest and round shoulders; a pair of long light whiskers framed his weary looking face, which was very pale, with high cheek bones, and thin and colourless lips. "The deuce take you!" he cried to the innkeeper, "why don't you take the water to my mother?"

At this moment Madame Bérú hurried forward with a tray in her hand, but all at once a whirlwind of velvet and lace swept into the room. The

wearer was a tall woman with pale yellow hair, which escaped profusely from under a small straw bonnet with a white *aigrette*. She wore one of those light coloured travelling dresses, short and capriciously trimmed, which had made Van Klopen's fortune.

Pouring herself out some water she drained the glass. "I was dying of thirst," she said. And then dipping a corner of her embroidered handkerchief in the water, she bathed her eyes, murmuring: "The idea of not being able to get a glass of water at the station!"

Meanwhile, talking and laughing were heard outside, and the carriage lamps were flashing. Unaffectedly curious, the baron rose and looked out; he fancied there were seven or eight persons in the carriages. But he had little time for his observations, for the duchess and her son speedily joined their guests, the vehicles rolled away, and the ordinary quiet of the night came over the little inn.

VII.

ON the morrow of the duchess's arrival, Raymond was smoking a cigar at the door of the Rising Sun and waiting for the baron, when the postman approached and handed him a letter. Raymond at once recognized the handwriting of his friend M. Roberjot. He broke the seal and hastily read as follows:—"Dear Raymond—As you will remember, it was agreed when your brother Jean left that all his important letters should be addressed to me, lest his plans and the real object of his journey should in any way be discovered by his mother or yours. Jean has remembered this, and I have just received a letter from him, of which I send you a copy."

This copy was in Roberjot's own writing. He had evidently not cared to confide the task even to his trustworthy secretary. "After the vilest voyage," it began, "prolonged to an extraordinary extent by contrary winds and disheartening calms, I at last arrived at Valparaiso, well and full of hope. But I rejoiced too soon, for it was by no means an easy matter to get from Valparaiso to Talcahuana, where my father landed. I was told that I must wait a month, to which I naturally objected, for under the circumstances a month struck me as an eternity. I therefore searched for a private mode of conveyance, and, thanks to the energy and intelligence of a compatriot, I found a worthy man who, owning half a dozen horses, agreed to convey me and my baggage quickly and cheaply. But this agreement was a mere figure of speech. To travel on horseback through a charming country is, as you know, very nice, but it is not the most expeditious way of getting over the ground. At last, however, after a protracted journey, my guide said to me: 'Look—here we are!'

"I looked and espied a long row of one-storied houses, built of bricks dried in the sun. And this was the town of Talcahuana. It had been so often destroyed by earthquakes that its four thousand inhabitants were tired of building anything but huts. Ah! my dear friend, you will believe me when I say that I was nearly suffocated with emotion when I entered the village in the dim twilight. As I traversed the lonely streets, or rather lanes, I said to myself that my father was perhaps living in one of these very cabins, and that within forty-eight hours, perhaps, I should find him, and receive from his hands that letter which would give us the weapon we had longed for during fifteen years.

"Although I found a comfortable bed in the house of a French trader, I

could not sleep; for I longed for daylight to begin my search. It came, but my first investigations brought no result. The climate of Chili is delightful, and life seems easy and simple there. The fair Chilians are so attractive that no ship ever anchors in Concepcion Bay without several sailors deserting. For this reason the arrival of strangers is not so much remarked, and thus my task became all the more difficult, and I saw myself compelled to adopt a course which I had sworn to you, half in jest, I would try—namely, that of questioning every living being in the town, one after the other. I asked if they had ever heard of a Frenchman named Cornevin, or Boutin, who had arrived at Talcahuana early in 1853 on board of an American brig. I added, to recall him to their recollection, that he was a political prisoner who had escaped from the Devil's Island; and then I ventured on sketching a portrait of my father, my own faint recollection of him being assisted by a careful description given me by Nantel. But, alas! so many years had elapsed—so many American brigs had anchored off Talcahuana—that no one could give me the slightest clue.

"I began to feel discouraged, and said to myself that Raymond and Léon were right in advising me not to undertake this journey, when all at once I was favoured with a piece of wonderful good-luck. Talcahuana is not a large town, and people freely occupy themselves with the affairs of their neighbours. I was soon known, the motive of my voyage was discussed, and people became quite interested in the young French painter who was looking for his father—a political exile. I knew this, and was therefore hardly surprised when, one afternoon when I was kept in-doors by the heat, I was told that some one wished to see me. This some one proved to be an old smuggler, who had been detained for two months on the other side of the Cordilleras, and who had returned to Talcahuana only the night before. He perfectly remembered the Frenchman I had described, and the story of whose escape he had often heard; he could not remember his name, however; still he was sure I might hear more by applying to an old smuggler named Pincheira, who lived at a little port only a short distance off.

"In ten minutes I was on horseback, and in a couple of hours had found my man. As soon as I began my story he told me that he remembered my father very well, and he at once gave me such details that I saw I was on the right track at last. Our father was known to Pincheira under the name of Boutin. He was nearly famished, he said, when he first knew him, and he was clad in rags. Pincheira's compassion was aroused, and he was fully repaid for the help he gave, for he had never seen so industrious a man, or one more greedy of gain—indeed our father saved every sou he earned, declaring he needed to become rich, and would do so, or die in the attempt.

"A year later it appears that Pincheira's son took a notion to try his fortune in Australia, and my father went with him. Pincheira himself knew nothing more, but he declared that his son now living at Melbourne could undoubtedly give me further information. The old smuggler's last words when I left him were—'Your father is either dead or a millionaire!'

"To-morrow I start for Valparaiso, where I shall find some means of getting to Australia. Good-bye for some time, my dear friend. I shall write to my mother. My regards to Raymond and Léon.—Yours gratefully, JEAN."

To this epistle M. Roberjot had added a few words: "You see, dear Raymond, that Jean has done wonders. I send a copy of this letter to Léon by this same mail. Your mother and Madame Cornevin are in good health,

though they both miss their sons. There is nothing new here, but a change must soon come, for the embarrassment of the Imperial Government is more and more visible. Shall we have a Prussian war? Shall we have a liberal ministry? The one and the other perhaps—perhaps neither of them. You will have heard through the papers of the marriage of M. de Maumussy with a young Italian princess of great wealth. He has also been created a duke in honour of the occasion. My honourable friend Verdale asserts that M. de Combelaïne has now decided to marry with or without Flora Misri's consent. So if you happen to know of an heiress there would be a suitable husband for her! I have only ten more words to say. Be prepared for any event, for troublous times are at hand.—Your sincere friend, ROBERTOT."

Leaning against one of the doorposts of the Rising Sun, Raymond read Jean's letter over and over again. A new-born hope filled his heart, and at the same time he felt a sting of self-reproach. Jean Cornevin had acted, while he, Raymond Delorge, had done nothing—literally nothing. He was only aroused from his meditation by the boisterous voice of the baron, who gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder, and called out: "Are you as deaf as I am near-sighted? A nice pair we make, to be sure! Haven't you heard the landlord tell us three times that breakfast was on the table?"

Raymond had never acquainted his kind friend with the tragic mystery of his life; so he tried to smile, and followed him to the dining-room. But it was in vain that he tried to shake off his gloomy thoughts. He had not a word to say to M. de Boursonne, who, on his side, was gayer and more talkative than usual. However, when they started forth the fresh air restored Raymond in some degree. It was delightful weather, one of those mellow autumnal days with which Anjou is favoured every year. Never had the lovely valley of the Loire been more beautiful. The air was full of perfume and the buzz of bees. September rains had kept the meadows as green as in spring time, and August suns had imparted the softest tints to the woods. The leaves of the poplar trees, trembling in the breeze, seemed woven of gold thread. Over the hedges, scarlet with haws, hang delicate branches of clematis. "One month more of such weather, my dear Delorge," said the baron, gaily, "and we shall have completed our work from Tours to Rosiers."

They were then working on the left bank of the Loire, between Gennes and Les Tuffeaux, and to reach the scene of operation they had to follow a delightful road skirting the river, and shaded by tall, overhanging trees. Behind them trudged their attendant, carrying the lunch-basket. The dead twigs and leaves crackled and rustled under their feet as they walked along, but suddenly from the direction of Maillefert, there came louder music, the baying of dogs and the blowing of horns. "They are hunting near here!" cried the baron, and he stood still to listen. "If I'm not mistaken," he added, "the fair duchess must be entertaining her friends in the woods to-day." And he called to the attendant who was a native of the place. "Are there any deer in those woods over there?" he asked.

"I don't think so, sir. I don't fancy there are any deer about here except in the Parc de la Ville Haudry—but they are not allowed to be shot."

"Then what are the dogs after?"

"Oh! when the duchess comes, sir, she brings foxes in barrels with her, and lets one of them loose whenever she wishes some amusement, so I suppose the dogs and the huntsmen are galloping after a fox of hers."

The baron nodded. "Excellent!" he said; "a most aristocratic way of

breaking their necks!" By this time he and Raymond had reached their men, who were at work, and they soon forgot all about the dogs and the hunt.

Daylight was waning and a light fog was creeping up the valley when Raymond left off work. He lighted a cigar, and while waiting for the baron to jot down the result of certain soundings, he took a seat at the foot of a tree beside the road. He had not been there for five minutes when down the road under the spreading vault of the lofty trees, there came a woman who was walking very rapidly. She was simply dressed in brown silk, and wore a broad brimmed straw hat. Her face was entirely hidden by a parasol which she held in front of it to ward off the rays of the setting sun right before her. Raymond was looking at her with a certain amount of curiosity, admiring the grace of her walk, when, to his surprise, she suddenly stopped short but ten paces off. She seemed to be listening and waiting. Then all at once she closed her parasol, darted through the scanty hedge and made her way into a small grove, where she stood perfectly still. Raymond was struck by the timid, frightened expression of her face. She had not seen him, and had no suspicion that he was near her, but he could see her very clearly. She was a girl of twenty or thereabouts, with a fair, gentle face; a blonde, with large blue eyes.

"She is hiding," thought Raymond, "but from whom, and why?"

It was not long before he learned. The grating of wheels and the clatter of hoofs caused him to turn his head, and he saw an open carriage drawn by a pair of magnificent horses coming towards him. It was one of the same carriages he had seen on its way to the station the night before. There were two ladies carelessly lying back in it. They were both of them pretty, but exceedingly overdressed. Following the carriage came a number of horsemen, and in the centre of this group rode the Duchess de Maillefert looking bold and conspicuous in her close-fitting habit and tall hat.

"It is true," said a mocking voice behind the young engineer, "I should never think the duchess was more than twenty."

Raymond turned. The baron stood beside him with his hands in his pockets and an ironical smile on his lips. However, the young man made no rejoinder. All his attention was turned to the grove where the young lady had taken refuge. Suddenly he saw her emerge cautiously from its shelter, listen, and then, considering the danger over, return to the highway. As she did so she perceived the two engineers. She gave vent to an exclamation of mingled surprise and alarm, and looked quite ready for flight. But gathering her courage together, she passed them, acknowledging their respectful salute with a slight bow.

Never was a man so astonished as the baron. He stood there with his eye-glass on his nose, and his hat in his hand. "Where on earth did this girl come from?" he asked at last.

Raymond did not answer. He would have found it difficult to explain why, but he shrank from describing the little scene he had witnessed to the baron. "She must have sprung up out of the ground," continued M. de Boursonne. "If she isn't a ghost, I should like to know her name."

The baron's usual attendant had overheard these remarks, and he now came forward with a respectful bow, and said: "That young lady, sir, is Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir, and she came out of that little grove, where I saw her hide when she heard her mother and the party coming. It's very strange, sir, that

you've never seen the young lady before, for she's always in the woods and the fields, sometimes with her English governess, sometimes on foot, and sometimes on horseback, and I must say that I never saw any one take hedges and ditches better than she does."

With a gesture, the baron thanked the attendant for his information, and when he was alone again with Raymond, he said. "I can't get this young girl out of my head. Don't you think it queer that she is so much afraid of being seen by her mother? Do you not remember what the innkeeper told us?"

"Yes; but Bérú is a simpleton," replied Raymond.

"No doubt," rejoined the baron. "However I would give a good deal if the old artillery officer would come and smoke his pipe with us to night!"

Some good fairy must have heard this wish, for hardly had they finished dinner than the artillery officer appeared, ushered in by the landlord of the Rising Sun. And he was not alone. "He had taken the liberty," he said, as he entered, "to bring his nephew, Monsieur Savinien de Chènehutte, who was passing the day with him." M. de Chènehutte was a good-looking fellow of thirty, wide-shouldered and red-faced, with a self-satisfied air, and dressed carefully, but in atrocious taste. He was well-off, and lived on his estate. In reality, his name was simply Bizet, but he had adopted the name of Chènehutte to distinguish himself from his brothers. He liked it, and as it was the name of one of his estates, he put it on his visiting cards.

To the baron's first questions respecting Mademoiselle de Maillefert, the old artillery officer answered, with the indifferent air of a man who is too much absorbed in himself to care for others: "I know nothing about the young lady."

But De Chènehutte was better informed. "This girl's ways are very peculiar, certainly," said he; "she came to Maillefert about five years ago, and when people said that her mother had abandoned her, as it were, they wanted to be kind to her. The most distinguished ladies made advances to her, but she received them in the most haughty way, and did not even return their visits.

"Which certainly does not speak well for her bringing up," said the baron.

"They are all the same in that family," continued young De Chènehutte, "they despise all their neighbours. Do you know where the young duke goes for companions when he's here? Why to the cavalry school at Saumur!"

"Impossible!"

"It's true, I assure you—ask my uncle there. We are too insignificant for them. They bring their guests from Paris and Angers."

The baron was jubilant: he had found his man. "Listen to what this gentleman says, my dear Delorge, for it is very interesting. So the duchess, then, never invites the people hereabouts?"

"No, for she knows her invitations would not be accepted."

"And why?"

M. Bizet drew his chair closer to the baron's. "Because," he answered in a mysterious whisper—"because the duchess is a most compromising woman."

"Impossible!"

"Ask my uncle. He will tell you that her fortune, which was once enormous, is nearly gone; he will tell you also that her reputation has gone with it—that each year she makes herself conspicuous with some fresh simpleton. As for her *fêtes*, men can of course go to them, but not their wives and daughters."

If the baron enjoyed all this, Raymond did not, so he abruptly asked, "But what has all this to do with the young lady?"

M. Bizet de Chènehutte winked in a way which was meant to be very acute. "Oh!" said he, "she's quite another person. The boot there is on the other leg. She is as cunning as her mother is reckless. And yet to hear the talk of the peasants, you would suppose her to be the best and purest, as well as the most charitable, of women."

"And that strikes me as being a pretty good reputation."

"Yes, but it's only talk. Now, look at it for yourself. Is Mademoiselle Simone forced to live as she does? No! She is no uglier than other women, and she is immensely rich."

"But you just said the duchess was ruined."

"And that is quite true," answered Bizet; "but the young lady has a fortune in her own right. Maillefert belongs to her, and her wealth is simply enormous."

The old artillery officer burst into a laugh. "You may believe my nephew," he said, "for he is well informed."

The nephew coloured. "All the world knows——" he began.

"Yes, and you better than all the world; for last year, when you came to the conclusion that Mademoiselle Simone would make a charming Lady of Chènehutte, you took pains to inform yourself most fully."

The flush on Bizet's face deepened to crimson. "I made a great mistake last year," he said, "and I am ready to admit it. I reflected in time, however, and saw that if the young lady isolates herself in this manner it is because she has a good reason for doing so. Now, when you look at a girl's reason, you generally find a lover."

Raymond, who had been gradually growing angry, now started up impulsively and exclaimed: "You lie, sir; you lie!"

The bright colour on Bizet's face died away. "You must recall those words, sir," he rejoined.

Raymond shrugged his shoulders. "Most willingly," he replied, "if you will name this young lady's lover."

"No, sir; I will do nothing of the kind. You shall hear from me!" and so saying, Bizet rushed from the room.

"I am glad he's gone!" exclaimed the artillery officer. "Why is it that young people are always quarrelling?" Then turning to Raymond he added:

"I don't say that my nephew was right, but you will admit your language was unparliamentary."

"Sir?"

"There are some words that should never be heard, particularly when a man has had a good dinner, as my nephew always has when he dines with me." As he spoke, the old officer knocked the ashes out of his superb meerschaum and put it carefully into its case. "Silly—superlatively silly!" he muttered. "Where am I to look for my nephew now, I should like to know? I wonder if he has gone to the Café du Commerce. For this matter must be settled at once, and I count on you, baron, to bring M. Delorge to his senses while I quiet my nephew." And so saying he went off.

As soon as the baron heard the door close he walked up to Raymond, and crossing his arms, exclaimed: "You drank too much wine at dinner, or else you have lost your mind."

"Why, sir?"

The baron raised his arms despairingly. "He asks why!" he cried, in

a tone of compassion. "I also ask why you have seen fit to fly into a passion on account of the senseless chatter of an underbred idiot. I thought the man very amusing, and I expected to spend a very pleasant evening, which you have spoiled entirely."

But Raymond had not yet recovered from the passion he had been thrown into by what he had heard. "The fellow said things that made my blood boil," he exclaimed.

"What things?"

"He said the young lady had a lover."

"What if he did? What is it to you?"

Raymond was somewhat embarrassed. "Isn't it clear," he said, "that it's so much low slander, prompted by the refusal he received from the young lady's family?"

The baron shrugged his shoulders up to his ears. "And what if it is? How on earth does that affect you? Are you Mademoiselle Simone's brother, friend, or relative? Do you know her? Have you ever spoken to her?"

Raymond occupied himself with lighting a cigar, and seemed to have a great deal of trouble with the matches. "I dare say I have been absurd," he said.

"Indeed you have! Utterly ridiculous."

"However, no man shall ever insult a woman by speaking of her in that way in my presence. And if all men rebuked such scoundrels promptly, the reputation of young girls would not be at the mercy of such light tongues. I have a sister, and if some villain spoke of her as this man Bizet spoke of Mademoiselle Simone, I would be grateful to any man who undertook her defence."

At any other time the baron would have been quite interested by Raymond's excitement, but he wished now to cool him down and not add oil to the flames. He therefore said: "That is all very well—but you have said enough on this occasion. The artillery officer will bring his nephew back so you must shake hands with him, and let the matter end."

At this moment the street door opened—but it was not the Bizets, returning; it was a young man who asked to see M. Raymond Delorge in private. "Oh! you may speak before this gentleman," said Raymond.

The young man thereupon seated himself, with his legs well apart and his hands on his knees, and then, in a solemn tone, he explained that he had been sent by his friend, M. de Chènehutte, who had been grievously insulted by M. Delorge, in view of arranging a duel.

"Tut! tut!" said the baron.

But Raymond interposed. "I am quite ready to meet Monsieur Bizet de Chènehutte," he replied.

"Then, please name your seconds, sir, and we will arrange preliminaries."

Raymond had not thought of this. "I have not had time to choose seconds, sir, but it will not take long. Where shall they meet you?"

"At my house, sir—not two steps from here," and the young man handed his card to Raymond, bowed, and retired with the dignity of a high priest.

M. de Boursonne was out of patience. "I hope you are satisfied now, Delorge!" he cried. "You have a duel well started—but where are your seconds coming from?"

"I depend on you, Sir, to act as one of them."

"On me! Upon my word, you must be quite mad if you think that I, your chief, will sanction your folly by my presence. No, indeed. It would

be a disgrace, and only increase the scandal. Don't you realize that you will become the talk of the whole country side? And for the matter of that, it will be the same with Mademoiselle Simone. A nice service you have rendered that poor girl. A perfect Don Quixote, you are! You think I will be your second! You are mad, my dear boy."

It is possible that this reply was not unexpected by Raymond. "Very well," he replied, "then I will ask M. Bérú to find me two men in the neighbourhood who have formerly served in the army. They won't refuse."

The baron did not seem to hear. He was walking up and down the dining-room smoking his pipe. Suddenly, however, he exclaimed: "No, Delorge, you must not do that. You are a good fellow and I will serve you. Of course you see that I shall get into trouble, but never mind. I will take one of the assistants with me and go and see your men."

"Ah! sir," began Raymond who was greatly pleased.

"That will do! That will do!" said the baron. You may thank me to-morrow—just now we will talk sense. What weapons do you prefer?"

"It is not for me to choose."

"Never mind that, answer my question. Which do you prefer, pistols or swords?"

"I don't care."

"The deuce you don't! Are you bad with both?"

To the baron's great surprise, all Raymond's animation had vanished. He had turned pale, and it was in a low voice that he replied: "I am both a good shot and a good swordsman, sir, so unquestionably superior with both, that I feel myself to be acting almost dishonourably in meeting this young man."

The baron's eyes twinkled behind his glasses. "Are you in jest?" he asked.

"By no means, sir; I was never more serious. For years I have lived in the hope of fighting a duel with a man whom I mortally hate, and who is one of the most skilful shots and swordsmen in Paris. For years I have never missed practising daily in a shooting gallery and a fencing room. I challenged my enemy—he refused the challenge; but my dexterity remains to me."

The baron did not ask a question; which was very nice on his part. He left the room, and when he returned in an hour later he said to Raymond: "It is all settled; you will use your sword to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

VIII.

RAYMOND warmly expressed his thanks and tried to excuse himself for the distasteful task he had imposed on the old gentleman. "I am glad," he said, "that my adversary has selected swords, for with those weapons I can manage the affair as I choose." And this was all he said.

The baron saw that the young fellow's mood had changed during his absence, for he was now pale and depressed; and as the old gentleman went to his room, he said to himself: "What does this all mean? I wonder if what the boy said about his superiority was mere talk? He surely can't be afraid!"

No—Raymond was not afraid, but during that hour of waiting he had reflected. His irritation had abated, and he passed condemnation on his

own conduct. Had he any right to risk his life? His father had been assassinated by scoundrels who lived unpunished, honoured, and rich; and instead of exclusively thinking of revenging his murdered father, he was, like the Don Quixote the baron called him, about to fight the first foe he came across, for the good fame of an unknown woman. With such thoughts, it was impossible for him to close his eyes, and in the morning his face showed such signs of sleeplessness that the baron could not refrain from saying: "Good Heavens, my dear fellow, what has gone wrong with you? Are you ill?"

The tone in which these questions were asked told Raymond what were the suspicions in the baron's mind, and so thus summarily recalled to the situation and its exigencies, he said "I was never better, sir, I——"

But he was interrupted by the inkeeper, who, having listened at the door to some purpose, now came in and said that as the gentlemen were going out so early, he had taken the liberty of preparing something for them to eat. This attention delighted the old engineer. In vain did he talk with a certain roughness of manner; his heart was very soft, and he realized now that he was very fond of Raymond, so when he saw him about to eat, he exclaimed: "Look out; a man who is going to fight a duel should keep his stomach empty. It is better in case of accidents."

"Never fear!" cried Raymond.

"I do fear—and remember that I have seen very inexperienced persons do clever swordsmen much harm."

The more the baron watched Raymond the more puzzled he was by the singular variations of his mood. "There must be some mystery in this boy's life," he said, "of which I know nothing."

However, Raymond drank a glass of wine and then gaily said "I'm ready, my dear baron," whereupon they started off.

The meeting place was on the other side of the Loire, on the outskirts of a little wood, and as they walked rapidly over the bridge the baron said: "I'm willing to wager my life that Bizet will make an apology."

But he was mistaken. Round about Saumur almost all the young men are swordsmen, and none of them are cowards—although some may be fools, and Bizet probably the greatest among them. Besides, he had spoken so much and so violently the night before at the café of Rosiers that there was no retreat open to him. He was well known in the province, and occupied a certain position. Did he not possess a pair of thoroughbreds, one of which he himself rode at the Saumur races in a pink jacket? Had he not also five dogs, three of which were turn-spits, but which he called his hounds? So was he not entitled to deference? Raymond soon pointed him out to the baron, for he was approaching the meeting-place by another path.

His uncle, who looked sadly out of temper, was with him, acting as one of his seconds, together with a young man who was pale and troubled. On the outskirts of the grove the two adversaries stopped and bowed to each other, while the old artillery officer, setting all established rules at defiance, went up to the baron, and said: "Tell me, sir, are we to let these young idiots quarrel for a mere word?"

"It is certainly absurd," answered the baron. "Let your nephew name the lady's lover and my principal will withdraw his offensive word."

"Go on, then—if you will," grumbled the officer, and he drew two swords from a serge wrapper and handed one to each of the two adversaries.

They took up their positions, and he stepped back. While the seconds had been talking together, Raymond had caught sight of several pairs of

eyes peering from among the bushes. "Am I crazy?" he said to himself. "It is certainly a most extraordinary freak of imagination."

But it was not imagination. The news of the duel had spread through Rosiers, and as amusements and strong emotions are as rare there as in all similar places, a considerable number of people had promised themselves the pleasure of witnessing the scene. They had discovered the place appointed for the meeting, and had been waiting there since sunrise. There was even one lady present, and her imprudence injured her reputation, for people charitably interpreted it as proof of the great interest she took in M. Bizet de Chènehutte.

Raymond knew nothing of all this, but Bizet did, and the knowledge caused him to cross swords with considerable vigour. He had no doubt of victory, for he had taken lessons of a good master, and he was quite satisfied with his proficiency. Alas! in ten seconds he recognized his own weakness. Vainly did he multiply his attacks—turning and bounding, retreating and advancing—he only succeeded in putting himself out of breath. Cold and composed—as quite at ease as if he had been using buttoned foils, in a fencing-room, Raymond seemed to be playing with his adversary until, with one quick turn, he knocked the sword from Bizet's hand and sent it flying.

"Enough!" cried the old officer, dashing between them. "Enough!"

This was also the opinion of his nephew; but he felt so many pairs of eyes upon him that, in his rage and humiliation, he determined to make an effort to retrieve the combat. "No, it is not enough!" he cried, picking up his sword. "That was a mere accident."

But this was not the view his uncle took of the case, for approaching the baron, he said: "It is clear that my nephew is as much at the mercy of your man as a mouse would be in the claws of a cat. For Heaven's sake, don't let them go on!"

Without answering yes or no, the baron went towards Raymond and said in a low, quiet voice: "No misplaced generosity—I see you are a clever swordsman—finish the matter with a little flesh wound; this might go on for hours."

Raymond hesitated. He had resolved to punish Bizet, but his wish was to disarm him over and over again until he acknowledged himself conquered. He felt, however, that he must accede to the wishes of his friend. So he answered: "As you please, sir."

The baron now moved aside again. "Take your positions, gentlemen," he said, "and after the next bout we shall call on you to stop, whatever be the result."

It was with the blind rage of a wild beast that Bizet now threw himself on Raymond. His cheeks were whiter than linen, his eyes suffused with blood, and his lips tightly compressed. Foolish though he was, he had divined the intentions of his adversary, and the thought of ignominious defeat was more than he could bear. He even wished to receive a wound. He would have preferred a pretty bad one rather than leave the field without a scratch. He, therefore, tried rather to be wounded than to defend himself, and Raymond on his side managed so well, that his sword merely pierced the fleshy part of Bizet's arm.

"Touched!" said that interesting young man, dropping his sword and falling into the arms of his seconds, who, on seeing the blood, ran to his assistance. Then three or four stifled exclamations were heard in the thicket; but the anxiety was not of long duration, for the old officer, who knew some-

thing of wounds, looked at this one, and said, half smiling, "He won't die this time!"

Bizet opened his eyes. "No, no," he said, in a faint voice; "it is nothing—the feeling of that cold, cold steel is over."

He was perfectly delighted by this solution, which saved him from the ridicule which would otherwise have been his portion. The superiority of his rival was so manifest that his wound was rather a distinction than aught else. When he was on his feet again he advanced to Raymond, and in the most tragic tone, exclaimed: "I confess my error, I implore you to accept my apologies, and I wish the whole universe could hear them."

"Ah!" whispered the baron mockingly in Raymond's ear, "you are now exalted to an enviable rank; you are now Bizet's best friend!"

"That is to say I have made a fool of myself," thought Raymond, who at present realized that the duel had had a great many spectators.

M. Bizet perfectly understood Raymond's generosity, and, much to his credit, he was not angered by it. He insisted on the party of six going home together. Poor Raymond! What with the baron, who overwhelmed him with sarcastic congratulation, and De Chènehutte, who crushed him with protestations of friendship, he walked along with bowed head, feeling much as if he were going to a dentist's to have a tooth pulled out.

They had just reached the bridge when a lady on horseback was seen trotting quickly towards them. "Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert," said Bizet, with a most respectful bow, as she passed by; and he then snatched hold of Raymond's hand. "I assure you," he said, "now that I know your sentiments for that young lady, she will always be sacred to me."

This speech fully realized the prediction of the baron, who had said the evening before: "If you think you are doing this young lady a service you grossly deceive yourself."

Thus easily is a woman, though she be as pure as snow, compromised and injured. Small towns are especially pitiless in this respect, and everyone at Rosiers knew that Mademoiselle de Maillefert had been the cause of this duel. In vain did Raymond say: "On my honour I know nothing whatever about this young lady, I never even spoke to her. I am only here for a short time, and shall probably leave without even being introduced to her. She does not even know of my existence. I undertook her defence just as I should take that of any woman who was grossly insulted."

But this was unknown language for Rosiers. It is only in romances that ladies find such disinterested defenders. When a man risks his life for a woman he has some tangible reasons. All this was implied by Bizet's tone, and his wink signified more—it meant this: "If we meet Mademoiselle Simone on our road, it is because she knew of the duel and was anxious."

All these considerations weighed so heavily on Raymond that he was silenced. He realized, too, that the less he said now the better. In vain did he try to get rid of his recent adversary—Bizet clung to him as obstinately as lime to the wing of a bird caught in a snare. Wishing to be especially agreeable, he insisted on talking about Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and laid the blame of his foolish words on his uncle's good wine. "I admit, Monsieur Delorge," he said, "that I should have been delighted if she had been willing to marry me. Not that I think her pretty, but she is very nice. She is not clever; all the women, in fact, call her very dull, but she has plenty of good common sense. Do you know that she manages all her enormous fortune herself?"

"My dear sir!" expostulated Raymond.

But no, the ingenuous youth continued: "I am pretty clever in business affairs myself, but this girl of twenty is cleverer than I. She attends also to some of her mother's and brother's matters. They are perfect sieves, they are—they never keep a sou. She directs the labourers, understands the crops, manages the vineyards, and pays off the workmen——"

"I entreat you," interrupted Raymond, "to select some other topic of conversation. Anything you choose, except——"

"Except what interests you most!" continued the simpleton, with a bland smile. "I admit that it is a little trying when a man is modest to enumerate all the treasures he possesses, or is about to possess. But I wish to repair my error of last night. In all Anjou there is not another woman like the one you have chosen. I admit that she is very haughty, and although familiar with the peasants, she treats us with unsupportable pride. But a husband like yourself will soon change all that. She has excellent qualities. She understands the management of money, and is economical in spite of her great wealth. Her tastes are simple; no luxury or nonsense in her toilets, which are too plain, in fact." He sighed as he spoke, and with his hand on his heart, continued: "What a pair we should have made had she been my wife! In ten years we should have quadrupled our capital! I mean what I say. I should have discarded the duchess and her brother, and I advise you to do the same. The duchess would crunch down the devil and his horns, and in a short time there would be nothing left. As to the young duke, he has long since got rid of his last inch of land, and he is up to his ears in debt. In Paris, at Angers, at Saumur, even at Rosiers, he owes money to everybody—lawyers, usurers, and tradespeople."—

If Bizet had been told that Raymond had great difficulty in refraining from flying at his throat and strangling him, he would no doubt have been much surprised. Still this was the fact. When they reached Rosiers, Bizet was very anxious to take him to his uncle's to breakfast, declaring that reconciliations were never real ones until they were sealed over a bottle. But Raymond could stand no more. "Impossible! Another time!" he replied, abruptly, and bowing to his recent adversary, he went off with long strides in the direction of the Rising Sun.

Now that all danger was over, the old engineer thought he had a right to take the bridle off his tongue, and so as he walked on beside Raymond, he muttered: "A nice day this has been! A day well begun! It is not noon yet. We have time for several more acts of folly."

"Ought I to have apologised to that idiot then? Is that what you wished me to do?"

"No—by no means. I should think you ought to be proud, however, that after ten years' practice, which have given you wonderful dexterity, you have achieved the great feat of pricking Monsieur Bizet de Chènehutte in the arm."

A cruel foe acquainted with Raymond's past could not have wounded him more severely. He turned very pale, and in a hoarse voice he replied: "Don't say things like that to me, sir. You will make me regret that I did not nail the animal to a tree like an impaled butterfly."

"I should not have lifted my finger to prevent you," grumbled the baron. "But," he continued, "between you, you have hopelessly compromised this young lady."

"I am sick of hearing about her!" cried Raymond. But he did not tell the truth. Something told him that this young girl, whom he as yet merely knew by name, would have a decided influence upon his future. In what way he knew not, but the sentiment clung to him.

"This Delorge is a strange fellow!" said the baron to himself. "I am convinced that there is some mystery in his life, the knowledge of which would give me a key to the strange contradictions I find in his character. He must be made to tell it me, that is all there is about it!"

On reaching the inn they were received with joyous exclamations by Master Béru, who stood watching for them at the door, with his snowy apron and knife stuck in his belt. "I told my wife this morning," he said, "that nothing would happen to you, but all the same, she insisted in going off to church to burn a taper before the altar."

"Dear me!" said the baron. "This is too much. We are the talk of the whole country side."

"I have said nothing, your honour. I never talk about what goes on in my house. It was M. Bizet who told the whole story. He talked half the night long at the café to a room full of people."

"Delightful!" muttered the baron, as he strode angrily into the dining-room, followed by Raymond.

Béru followed them, and apparently desirous of pleasing them, he fell tooth and nail on M. Bizet de Chênehutte. "He was conceited and miserly," he said. "He lived on bread and onions at home, so as to save money to make a show with at Rosiers. And I'm not surprised," he said, "at his bitterness against Mademoiselle de Maillefert, for she has unwittingly been the cause of his being laughed at by every one round about here. He asked her to marry him. Heaven only knows how he dared do so, or what put such an idea into his head. The idea of such a thing! As if a Maillefert would become Madame Bizet." At this point the worthy innkeeper looked round to see if any one was listening, for he liked to stand well with everybody. Then, lowering his voice, he added: "Everybody was on M. Delorge's side, and everybody was pleased when it was known that M. Bizet was wounded. There were two or three servants from the château at the café last night, and they could hardly contain themselves. I have just seen the old gardener, who has Mademoiselle Simone's confidence, and he was going from house to house with the air of a man who was trying to find out something."

Contrary to his habit, the baron let the conversation drop, and as soon as Béru was gone he turned to Raymond and said: "This threatens to turn out a fine adventure!"

Raymond restrained a movement of impatience. "I cannot conceive, monsieur," he said, "how a man of your intelligence can pay any attention to this innkeeper's foolish chatter." The baron smiled sweetly. "Go on my boy," he said to himself; "I will push you so hard that you will have to tell me your secret." Then, aloud, he replied, "What is there so ridiculous in this worthy man's narrative? Mademoiselle Simone hears that a young engineer has fought a duel in her defence, and she sends to find out something about this gentleman.—Now, what is the use of turning so red?"

Raymond had certainly coloured, but it was with anger. "Really, sir," he replied, "you are making me pay dearly for the service you have rendered me."

The baron said no more; he had gone as far as he dared, and for the rest of the day he made no further allusion to Mademoiselle de Maillefert. But that evening, at dinner, Master Béru handed them each a letter, which had been brought, he said, by a servant in livery.

The baron promptly opened the envelope bearing his name, and after glancing at the card it contained, he exclaimed: "Upon my life, Delorge, I

believe our adventure is bearing fruit. Open your letter and see if it be not a counterpart of mine. Open it, pray."

Raymond complied, and found an invitation card, which was couched as follows: "The Duchess de Maillefert presents her compliments and requests Monsieur Raymond Delorge to do her the honour of spending Saturday evening (October 24th) at the Château de Maillefert."

The baron was delighted. "Well! what have you to say to that?" he asked.

"I say that it is most extraordinary."

"And why? It is your duel, my dear fellow, that has won us this honour which Bizet would gladly have given his best horse for. This is what I call conquering an invitation at the point of the sword."

"Oh!"

"But there is no 'oh' about it. The duchess has it in her power to show you her gratitude, and she is eager to seize the opportunity."

"And yet—"

"You will be presented to Mademoiselle Simone."

Raymond reflected for a moment, with a frown on his brow. "I don't think I shall accept the invitation," he said.

The baron raised his arms in despair.

"You would never refuse it!" he cried.

"I am hesitating."

"And why?"

"Because, sir," answered Raymond—"because——" He stopped short. He was seeking for an excuse, for on no account whatever would he have told the truth. "Because," he said at last, I should have the air of going there to be thanked."

"That is not badly said," answered the baron, who was, however, by no means duped by these words. "As for myself," he continued, shaking the invitation, "I shall accept. Yes, savage, rustic, peasant as I am, I must see one of those *fêtes* which have so scandalized that innocent creature, Bizet. My dress-coat is at Tours with the rest of my luggage, and I shall write to-night to have it sent to me."

IX.

THERE are two Châteaux de Maillefert. The old one, formerly known as the Château de Chalendray, once crowned the summit of the slope and commanded the course of the Loire. Dismantled by Richelieu, however, it soon fell into ruins, and to-day ivy and brambles climb over two crumbling towers, which are all that remain. The new château is built lower down the hill. It is a large building in the best style of Italian art, with two wings and a flight of broad low steps in front. The wide entrance-gates, which were spared by the Revolution, are at once curious and beautiful, and the carvings in the chapel have great artistic value. The gardens are unrivalled, notwithstanding the comparative neglect in which they have been left for years. Designed in the style of the gardens of Marly, they form a succession of terraces connected by marble steps descending to the waters of the Loire. Clusters of trees, tall shrubbery and vines screen the walls, while beyond are dense masses of park trees. An avenue, nearly a thousand yards long, and shaded by century-old elms, leads from the high-road to the modern château. And up this avenue walked Raymond and the baron at about ten

o'clock on the Saturday evening specified in their invitation. After much perplexity and doubt, Raymond had decided to accept this most unexpected opportunity of making the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, and he had tried to convince himself that he went to the château for any other reason than the real one. "It is pure curiosity," he said. "How could I love a girl whom I never spoke to? Before three months are over I shall have left Rosiers for ever, and I shall never hear her name again!"

However, he was out of spirits and dissatisfied with himself, and barely answered the continual observations of the baron, who himself was by no means in an over-amiable frame of mind. He wore his dress-coat, which had come from Tours, and was full of creases. It was one of those good old coats with long tails and tight sleeves, which, after doing twenty-five years' good service, are cut up by economical mothers into an entire suit for a boy of ten years old. "What nonsense that fool, Bérú, said!" he grumbled, "when he pretended that the duchess was *obliged* to sell her land. When people are ruined they don't give such *fêtes* as this. Why, the mere illumination of this avenue costs as much as it would cost you and me to live on for a month!" And he was right, for countless Venetian lanterns were disposed among the trees, and gave the approach to the château a fairy-like aspect. "It is positively humiliating to come on our legs," continued the old engineer, "we ought to drive up in state. You ought to have borrowed your dear friend Monsieur Bizet's cabriolet!"

They were indeed probably the only guests who arrived on foot. The few pedestrians they espied among the trees were only persons attracted by curiosity from the village, who came to spy and mock. Carriages, however, were constantly passing them, conveying aristocratic dames and damsels in full ball-dress; and when they reached the court-yard they saw that, spacious as it was, it was too small for the many equipages that kept arriving. There were three rows of vehicles ranged along the walls, the handsome carriages which had brought millionaire beauties from Saumur or Angers standing beside the light wagons and chaises of the gentlemen farmers from Trèves or Saint-Mathurin. In the middle of the court-yard a kind of shed had been raised, and here, by the light of a blazing fire, innumerable servants in livery were warming themselves, and emptying bottles of wine standing in formidable array on a long table. "Happy innovation," remarked the baron, "and one which will land some of the carriages in the ditches on their way back. It quite reconciles me to coming on foot."

However, they hastened indoors, for it was clear that the *fête* had long since begun. All the front windows were blazing with light; the buzz of the crowd could be heard, and above it rose the music of the orchestra. In the marble hall stood numerous footmen arrayed in the Maillefert livery, and intent on showing the guests to the first floor, where several cloak-rooms, already crowded, had been thrown open. As the baron did not like crowds, he sought and found a vacant apartment, the door of which stood open like the others. In a moment Raymond was ready. But the baron was not so expeditious. He wiped his spectacles, looked for his handkerchief, and pulled on his gloves. "The arrangements are all good, so far," he said; "we will see——" But he stopped short, for in an adjoining apartment, the door of which, hidden by a curtain, stood open, a discussion could be heard going on. "Hush!" said the baron, and without the smallest shame he went toward the curtain.

"It is really most extraordinary," said a sharp, imperious female voice;

"it is incredible that you have not begun your toilette. Are you crazy, Simone? What on earth have you been doing?"

"You know, mamma," was the reply, in a sweet, pure tone, "I was attending to the last preparations for your *fete*."

"That is precisely what I complain of. Why should you perform duties which belong to my majordomo?"

"That may be, mamma, but my superintendence has certainly saved fifteen hundred or two thousand francs."

"Enough! This passion for economy is simply disgusting."

"And yet I should never have been able to serve you or my brother without it."

"Nice services! Rather than mortgage your meadows at Authion you have allowed Philippe to sell his property."

"I told you why, mamma. My income belongs to you and my brother, but neither of you shall touch the capital."

"Simone!"

"Yes—I mean what I say. You need never hope for concessions or weakness on this point. I shall defend my property, and if I die you will find that the capital will still be beyond your reach. You and Philippe will always have enough to live on no matter what you do. The Mailleferts shan't die in the almshouse."

If the baron had been alone and free to do as he pleased, he would have slipped under the sofa rather than have lost the end of this discussion, which threw such a startling light on the relative positions of the duchess and her daughter. Unfortunately, he was not alone. Raymond stood rooted to the floor, as it were, by surprise. He was intensely annoyed at the position in which he and the baron had been placed by a valet's stupidity in leaving this room open; and so, approaching the old engineer, he softly said: "Come, sir, let us go at once."

But the baron waved him aside. "Hush!" said he.

The discussion between mother and daughter was becoming more and more bitter, and attacks and rejoinders succeeded each other with extraordinary vivacity. "Ah, you forget yourself, Simone," cried the duchess at last. "You are wanting in respect to me—your mother—and to your brother, who is the head of the family."

"Madame!" implored the girl, "do you know there are at least five hundred persons in your rooms, and that all of them are commenting on your absence?"

"They are equally astonished at yours!"

"Not at all; for people know my dislike for society."

"They know that you affect to dislike it, and they know that it is most unnatural at your age, and they ask why it is."

"You know why, mamma."

"I know that you are the talk of the whole neighbourhood. I know that my daughter is the subject of brawls in wine shops, and that she has become a sort of heroine for foolish boys to go out and fight about. I am resolved to end all this. I won't tolerate these eccentricities for another day. No, you shan't adopt the *rôle* of a persecuted daughter. Your conduct is a tacit censure of mine. You have done this sort of thing long enough."

"Raymond caught hold of the baron's arm. "I insist," he said, in a low, indignant voice—"I insist on your coming away this moment. Come, or I shall go and leave you alone!"

The baron was obliged to yield, but when he reached the passage he

exclaimed: "I am quite proud of the opinion this excellent duchess so gracefully expressed of us. Wine-shop brawlers, foolish boys! Well, well!"

What did Raymond care for the opinion of the duchess? "I pity Mademoiselle Simone, sir," he said.

"Yes, with such a mother her life can't be a path of roses."

"And what resignation! Not a complaint!"

"Indeed? I think, on the contrary, she complained to some purpose. But she is right, poor child!" He turned round on the stairs, and in a more serious tone than was usual with him, said: "She is a brave, good girl. I would put my hand in the fire for her, and I like my hands and dislike pain. She is proud of her name, and she has a right to be so. She sacrifices herself to this illustrious name of Maillefert. She forgets herself, her youth, her beauty, and her dowry, to become the majordomo of an extravagant mother and wasteful brother." Never, according to Raymond's idea, had he heard the baron speak so well. "It is an odd family," continued the old gentleman, "where the daughter holds the key of the strong-box and mounts guard over the cash. We live in strange times. I have already seen a father and son ruin themselves together, but I never saw a mother and son do the same thing before. It is something new. Well, well!" He descended two or three more steps and then stopped again.

"I should really like to know whom our invitation comes from; from the mother, the brother, or the sister?"

Raymond would have very much liked to know the same thing, but he made no reply.

They had now again reached the hall, where a dozen belated guests were hurrying towards the stairs. A lackey, looking as solemn as a peer of England, preceded them to the door of the reception-room, and as they gave their names, he announced them: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge. The Baron de Boursonne."

The old engineer started, as if some one had poured a torrent of ice-water down his back. "How did the fellow know I was a baron?" he grumbled.

"You told him so, sir," answered Raymond, laughing.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, I heard you."

The good man shook his head. "Vanity of vanities," he murmured. "Such is the contagion of example. Give me your arm, my dear Delorge, so that we may not lose each other."

The precaution was a wise one, for the crush was great, and all the more so as a dance had just finished, and the gentlemen were looking for seats for their partners. When Mademoiselle Simone had said there were five hundred persons present she was far from the truth, for there were twice that number circulating through the three large drawing-rooms and the vast gallery which formed one wing of the château. Nothing could be more magnificent than these apartments, with their decorated ceilings, gilded cornices, large mirrors, and tall chimneys surmounted by the De Maillefert arms. And yet there was something in all this splendour which indicated past rather than present opulence. It was easy to see that these reception-rooms were seldom used. The curtains, as well as the seats against the wall, came from some furniture dealer at Angers, who had let them for a night and who would take them away in the next day.

"Wouldn't one swear," said the baron to Raymond, "that robbers had been in the place? And such is the case; but the robber is the dear duchess herself. Not being able to carry off the château, she has taken away the

furniture, the old carved woodwork, credences and antique tapestries, in fact all the artistic treasures which old families are so proud of, and which are handed down from generation to generation."

Our friends, however, were probably the only persons who proved such keen observers, for the ball was at its height, and to the gay refrains of a couple of orchestras, the fairest and wealthiest heiresses of Anjou were dancing with the simple delight of peasant girls. Mothers and chaperons sat against the walls in silk and velvet, their necks glittering with jewels and their heads covered with feathers or diamonds. At all the doors, and in the recesses of the windows, stood groups of white cravated men in conversation. Further on, from two small rooms communicating with the gallery, came the chink of gold on green tablecovers, and the sound of voices repeating the mystic words: "It is your play, I pass!" And meanwhile, lackeys were moving about carrying trays of ices, champagne, and sweetmeats.

"We have not done our duty," said the baron to Raymond. "We have not been received by any one. Where is the duchess? Hasn't she yet appeared?"

If they had listened to what was being said round about them, they would have found that other people were similarly puzzled. One over-dressed old lady, who was conversing with a stout gentleman, exclaimed: "It is her usual habit."

"Then why entertain?" was the question.

"Ah! dear marquis, when a woman has so much money, how else can she spend it?"

They both laughed knowingly; and then the marquis added: "At all events, she has never given a more superb *fête*."

"Never a more general one."

"That was what I meant to say. It must have been for some especial purpose."

"And it was."

"You know what it is then?"

"Certainly," said the marquis, and on hearing him the baron and Raymond forgot the ball and listened. "Yes," he resumed, "I am quite sure I know what the ball is given for. She wishes to marry her daughter." The old lady laughed. "Why are you amused, countess?" asked the marquis.

"Because you know very well that the girl's marriage would ruin our dear duchess. It is this little Cinderella who pays the fiddler when the duchess dances. Her husband would keep his wife's fortune, as he ought to do, instead of letting her mother and brother devour it. Go and ask the duchess for Simone's hand for your son, and see what she answers. Unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you consent to give a receipt for the dowry without receiving it."

"The stout marquis scratched his ear—which was his way of sharpening his ideas. "Perhaps you are right," he said; "but what does the duchess mean to do, then? Is she looking for a wife for Philippe?"

"Heavens and earth! what family would have him? He might find, perhaps, some ambitious merchant at Angers who would give a million or two for his name and his title, but he will never find a wife in our circle."

"I give it up, then. Come, dear countess, tell me what you know. I swear never to repeat it."

"It isn't worth the trouble, for the whole world will know in a week what I can tell you."

"Countess, I am in agony——"

"Then let me inform you that the duchess is here on an election campaign."

The marquis was so surprised that he started back, and in doing so trod on the foot of the baron, who was nearer than discretion warranted. "I beg ten thousand pardons, sir," said the marquis, graciously, and then hastily turning to the countess again he exclaimed: "What you say is incredible."

"It is true, all the same. Don't you know that the duchess is always at the Tuileries; that she goes with the court to Compiègne; and that she is seen everywhere with Maumussy's wife, and that she will, one of these days, be a lady-in-waiting to the empress?"

"A Duchess de Maillefert!"

"Precisely. When you are drowning you catch at anything, and the duchess and her son are in a very bad way. What will become of them when they have used up Simone's fortune? This is the question they ask themselves, and they have turned to the empire for an answer. They intend to obtain some sinecure—something very lucrative. Only as the empire does not give these sinecures for nothing, the duchess has promised to influence the legitimist nobility of Anjou, and lead us all to the feet of their imperial majesties."

"But it's monstrous!"

"Wait a moment. To make this dear duchess's political mission a trifle easier, the men in power have placed at her disposal a certain number of comfortable situations in the State service, which she will distribute. She has already offered me one for my son-in-law, who is not rich, as you know, and who has a large family."

"I must be dreaming, countess."

"That is to say you doubt, and you want proofs. Well look about you and you will see all the high functionaries of the department. You will see the Prefect of Saumur—and our own—the general commanding the corps d'armée, the commandant of the military school, with all the mayors, registrars of deeds, the provincial treasurers, and the inspectors."

Raymond and the baron looked at each other significantly. Their invitation was now explained.

"This being the case," rejoined the marquis, "I shall say good-night to the duchess, and let her understand that none of us will cross her threshold again. But where is she? What an extraordinary house! Not a lady to do the honours. Have you seen Mademoiselle Simone?"

"Not yet."

"And Philippe?"

"Ah! he must be in the card-room."

At this moment there was a movement among the throng, and as Raymond and the baron raised themselves on tip-toe, they saw the duchess and her daughter on the threshold.

X.

MOTHER and daughter looked like two sisters, so lightly had the years rested on the duchess's polished brow, and so little hold had the cares of life taken on her volatile, careless, selfish nature. Besides, the art of dress had no secret for her. Renouncing her usual eccentricity for this occasion—perhaps on account of her mission—she wore one of those exquisitely simple toilettes

which will always be the envy and the despair of provincial belles—toilettes in which every detail is blended to make a perfect whole. Her dress was of sea-green hue, the upper skirt being caught up with branches of eglantine, and the corsage being cut just low enough to show the beauty of her shoulders, but not to display them. Mademoiselle Simone, on the contrary, looked older than her years. Anxiety and care had cast a shadow over her sweet face betimes, and imparted something melancholy even to her smile. She wore a simple white dress, with a sprig of fuchsia, in her fair hair.

"Look at them," murmured the baron, "and tell me which of the two a stranger would call the elder, at first sight?"

"Mademoiselle Simone is very lovely."

"Yes, she certainly is. But, bless my soul, what strange creatures women are! Who would ever suppose that these two had just had a violent dispute?"

The worthy engineer was near-sighted. If his eyes had been as keen as his mental powers of observation, he would have detected that the colour on the duchess's cheeks was not natural, and that there was still an angry light in her eyes. He would have seen, too, that Simone was deadly pale, and that a tear trembled on her long lashes. But Raymond saw this, and he sighed.

She was now only a step or two from him, leaning on her mother's arm as they passed down the long gallery. Strangely enough, their guests by no means crowded eagerly around them—they were confronted on all sides by grave faces, constrained smiles and stately bows. The fact is, the story told by the countess to her friend had made the round of the rooms, and many of the Legitimist nobles had sworn never to enter Maillefert again. Raymond, indeed, heard one gentleman say: "It is an abominable snare, and but for my daughter, who is crazy to dance a little longer, I should go away at once."

The duchess was too keen not to divine what was going on, and to realize the disastrous results of her combinations. But she was also too much a woman of the world not to know how to hide her impressions and control her countenance. The more she met with reserve and disapproval the more gracious and smiling she became, till she elicited at least some few words of common-place politeness even from the most hostile.

"This is very curious," said the baron to Raymond, "and very interesting. Let us follow the duchess."

Having crossed the gallery, Madame de Maillefert had entered one of the cardrooms, where several young men were playing. She paused in front of a table on which several little piles of gold could be seen. "Are you not playing very high, gentlemen?" said the duchess.

One of the young men hastily raised his head. He was fair-haired, with a glass in his eye, and a very high standing collar; his waistcoat being secured by a single button, while the sleeves of his coat were ridiculously broad. "No, indeed, my dear mother," he answered; "there are a dozen of us, and only three hundred louis are on the table. It is a very mild little game, I assure you."

At this moment his adversary played, and the young duke dashed at his cards on the table in evident irritation. "It's clear that I'm not in luck to-night," he said.

Mademoiselle Simone gently laid her hand on his shoulder, at the same time whispering: "This ill-luck is a just punishment. Are you not ashamed to be here, when there are pretty girls in want of a partner?"

"That's a good joke!" he answered, sulkily. "The idea of my dancing a quadrille! Gentlemen, do you hear what my sister says?" and he went on with his play.

"The king!" he suddenly exclaimed.

"Philippe! dear Philippe!" coaxed his sister.

"I must say I don't think much of that young gentleman," muttered the baron to Raymond. "He's perfectly ridiculous with his hair parted in the middle, his eye-glass, his idiotic laugh, and his self-sufficient air!"

This was precisely Raymond's opinion, but he did not reply, for he was too much occupied in watching the duchess and her daughter, who had just seated themselves on a sofa in the gallery. "Now is our time," said the baron. "We will go and pay our respects to the ladies."

"Is it necessary?" objected Raymond.

"I should say that the most ordinary politeness required it."

"But I——"

The baron interrupted him. "Do you fear an allusion to your duel? You mustn't be disturbed—I doubt if these ladies have even heard of it. Our conjectures were entirely false. You heard what that old lady said—it is to our profession as State engineers that we owe our invitations. No one knows us here."

To their great surprise, however, just as the baron made his best bow before the duchess, an old gentleman standing beside her exclaimed, "The Baron de Boursonne, Madame la Duchesse, the great engineer who has the charge of the works on the Loire."

The duchess made some complimentary remark, but the worthy man hardly waited for its termination before he presented—"Monsieur Raymond Delorge, my friend and assistant."

Redder than any poppy, Raymond bowed in his turn, but not so low that he did not perceive Mademoiselle Simone's very forehead suffused with a flush deeper than his own, nor so quickly that he did not surprise a vivid gleam in her eyes, and a gesture promptly repressed, which indicated that her first impulse had been to hold out her hand.

The young fellow's heart was thrilled. "She knows of it," he said to himself, "and she is grateful."

The baron had noticed nothing of all this. He was deep in conversation with the gentleman who had addressed him by name, and who evidently was assisting the duchess in her political undertaking. However, this same individual soon broached such extraordinary theories respecting the coming elections, that the old engineer hastily interrupted him. "As I understand you, sir," he said, "you would like to turn the Loire into an election agent. You would like to use it to inundate the property of the folks who vote wrongly, and—and order it to respect that of the peasants who vote well. It is a brilliant idea. But rather a difficult one to carry into execution. Ask Monsieur Delorge."

But Raymond was not near enough to answer. He had seen Mademoiselle Simone leave her mother's side, and obeying an irresistible impulse he had followed her through the crowd, and finally stationed himself in a spot whence he could watch every expression on her face. She was sitting near two old ladies who were both talking to her at once.

Raymond was wonderstruck by the peculiar reserve with which the duchess and her daughter were treated in their own house. While the men stood in groups ruminating over the strange news anent the political mission confided to the duchess, while the older women laughed behind their fans,

the young people only thought of deriving as much enjoyment as possible from this rare break in the monotony of country life. "It is extraordinary," thought Raymond. "One would think it a subscription ball, where each person pays his money." At this moment his attention was attracted by five young men, who one after the other bowed before Simone, and evidently asked for a dance. But she refused them all. She preferred to sit where she was, not that she was much interested in the conversation of the two old ladies, for her thoughts were evidently elsewhere. Her eyes were riveted in one direction, and anxiety, anger, and grief, alternately appeared on her expressive face. "What is it that so absorbs her," wondered Raymond.

He could see nothing from where he stood, but he gradually worked his way near Simone, and soon discovered that she was looking in the direction of the card room. "Ah! I understand," said Raymond to himself, and he quietly walked into the room.

The young duke was still playing, and by the contractions of his frivolous features, it was easy to see that luck was still against him. He fingered his cards nervously, and constantly uttered some exclamation of annoyance. "It is disgusting! Not a decent card in my hand. You have all the luck," and so on.

His adversary, who was perfectly calm and self-possessed, had a countenance indicating limited intelligence, but great obstinacy. His turn to deal came; he shuffled the cards methodically, cut, and turned up—a king. "That makes me five," he said quietly—"I have won?" and with these words he drew the pile of gold towards him. "Shall we go on?" he asked.

But Philippe rose abruptly. "No," he replied; "I shall play no more; I should lose the coat off my back to-night. Do you know, gentlemen, that I am minus fifteen thousand francs by this evening's play?"

"Pshaw!" said one of the men. "What are fifteen thousand francs to you?"

Was he speaking seriously. Philippe looked at him to ascertain, but as the other bore his gaze unmoved: "Very well: let us have one more game," he said to his late adversary—"double or quits!" The other player did not reply. "Do you refuse?" urged the duke, turning pale. "Isn't the word of a Maillefert as good as a bond?"

He spoke so loud that it was impossible for Simone not to hear him. Raymond looked at her. She had turned whiter than her dress.

"I await your decision, sir," said the duke, in an almost threatening tone.

But the other was quite undisturbed. "The decision does not depend on me," he said.

"I don't understand you."

"Listen. I belong to a well-known club at Angers, all the members of which have sworn a solemn oath never to play for any larger sum than lies on the table. Article 7th of our by-laws states that whoever breaks his word in this respect is liable to a penalty amounting to double the sum. It would, therefore, cost me thirty thousand francs to have the honour of continuing to play as you propose."

The duke looked thunderstruck. "But this is an offence," he stammered "A direct insult."

"Oh! not all, sir."

A profound silence fell on the room—a silence that was all the more dreary on account of the gay music of the orchestra in the adjoining hall

All the men at the card-tables were looking on. They evidently dreaded some violent altercation. But at this moment Mademoiselle Simone entered. Poor girl! she tried to smile, as she took Philippe's arm, and turning towards their guests she said: "Allow me to take my brother away for a few moments."

"She has done well," said one of the players, when the brother and sister had gone off.

"Yes," added another, "she has indeed. This dear duke is delightful when he talks of losing the coat off his back. He lost it long ago. It is his sister's gown that he now runs the risk of losing."

From where Raymond stood he could see the brother and the sister talking together. The girl left her brother, and, returning in a few minutes time, she slipped a little package into his hand. He then quickly turned away, and re-entered the card-room.

"Now," said he, laying a number of bank notes on the table as he spoke. "Now, sir, you can play without breaking your oath. Another game—double or quits." The duke's late adversary was startled out of his usual imperturbability. "However," resumed Philippe, "you know that this is a matter of ten thousand francs. If you win it will be twenty thousand. Of course, I do not wish to urge you if you are unwilling to run the risk of losing the amount you have already won."

The laugh was now on the duke's side. Everyone in the card-room gathered round the table, and the game began. It was watched with breathless interest, and finally Philippe won. Radiant with triumph, he now exclaimed: "Will you continue? As I am under no oath, I can play as long as you please."

It was with the keenest anxiety that Raymond had watched the play and its consequences. All that Simone had suffered he had suffered too. He had pictured to himself her agony at hearing the name she bore so insulted, for undoubtedly Philippe had been cruelly insulted. All that his adversary had said of the club rules was a piece of pure fiction, invented to get rid of those players who pocket their winnings, and who, if they lose, never pay. And plainly enough the Duke de Maillefert was looked upon as one of these. "It was this," thought Raymond, "that decided the girl to give her brother the sum he needed."

All the players stood looking on, with bated breath while the two men fought over the young girl's savings. But as soon as Raymond saw that Philippe was victorious, he darted towards Simone with the words: "He has won!"

She started as violently as if she had been asleep and a pistol had been fired off in her ear. "Sir!" she exclaimed, but as she raised her head her eyes met those of Raymond; her face flushed, and in a faint voice she uttered a few words of thanks. The two old ladies, near whom she sat, opened their eyes in astonishment at the sight of this stranger addressing Mademoiselle de Maillefert with such evident emotion. "Is he playing still?" asked Simone.

"No," answered Raymond, "he is standing near the window talking."

As he spoke his voice faltered. He had just noticed the eyes of one of the old ladies riveted upon him, and he realized that he had harmed Simone by exposing her to remark. Indignant with himself, deploring his own folly, and not knowing what to do or say, he stood for a moment in silence. Then, as an idea came to him, he asked: "Will you do me the honour, mademoiselle, to dance the next quadrille with me?"

She half rose and resealed herself. "I can't," she said. "I have declined so many times this evening. I did not feel well enough."

Raymond turned pale. "Cannot I persuade you?" he urged.

The girl's hesitation was so plain, that one of the ladies bent her head with its nodding plumes towards her. "You are too scrupulous, my child. You did not feel well enough to dance when you refused those gentlemen. That was right enough. Now that you are better, this gentleman asks you, and you accept. Take my advice, make the most of your youth, and dance."

Simone did not understand the perfidy of these words, nor did she notice the venomous smile which accompanied them. So she rose, laid her trembling hand on Raymond's arm, and went to the dancing gallery with him.

The pitiless baron would now have laughed heartily at his young friend, who moved about as if he were in a dream. He asked himself if he were a conceited fool—if the sympathy he seemed to read in this girl's eyes was not a freak of his own imagination. What mysterious affinities bound them together? How had she divined his interest in her? Ah! had they only been alone he would have fallen at her feet, and sworn fidelity forever.

However, the orchestra was playing the first bars of a quadrille, and they had only time to take their places. Raymond felt that curious eyes were fixed upon him, and that it was imperative he should control his emotion and make a few common-place remarks to his partner.

Alas! he could not think of a word to say; not one of those phrases which are usually exchanged at such moments would come to his lips. Perhaps Simone took pity on him, for she presently asked some question about the baron's undertakings. It was with all the eagerness of a drowning man snatching at a branch that Raymond answered her; and he began with amazing volubility to describe their plans and studies. "I am lost!" he said to himself, meanwhile. "She will think me a fool with this prosy scientific chatter."

However the interminable dance ended at last, and Simone asked to be taken to her mother, who sat in the same place with a little cluster of people near her. But her eyes were flashing with anger, in consequence of the acute attacks of the baron, who had almost compelled her to confess the meaning of her entertainment. Seeing her daughter on Raymond's arm, she asked in a vexed tone if she had been dancing.

"Yes, mamma."

"With this gentleman?"

"Yes."

"But I thought I heard you tell Monsieur de Luxé that you were indisposed and would not dance to-night?"

The girl seated herself without replying, and Raymond would perhaps have committed the blunder of offering some apology, had he not been touched on the shoulder. He turned and found himself face to face with the baron. "I am tired out," said the old gentleman. "Balls are not much in my line. Let us be off."

Raymond followed him, and they went towards the room where they had left their coats. But the door was shut and locked on the inside. "Well! this is nice, upon my word," grumbled the baron.

He was trying to open the door, when an old servant out of livery hastened towards him. "What can I do for you, gentlemen?" he asked.

"We want our coats, which are in that room."

The servant looked at them with an odd expression. "It was by a mistake," he said, "that you were shown into that room. It belongs to the suite of Miss Dodge, the English governess."

At any other time the baron would have felt it his duty to obtain all the information possible respecting this Miss Dodge, but for the moment he was greatly out of patience. "Do you mean," he asked, "that the governess has locked up our overcoats?"

"No, indeed, they have been taken away, and if you will take the trouble, gentlemen, to follow me——"

They did so, and found that everything belonging to them had been carefully removed to another room. Then they donned their overcoats and hurried down the stairs.

It was now three o'clock. The elder people had gone off, and their carriage-lamps shone through the trees along the road beside the river. Only the fanatics remained at Maillefert—those who dance until the last candle has burned out, until the last musician in the orchestra has played his final note. These indefatigable persons were in yet the gayest spirits, and their shadows could be seen whirling past the windows. The coachmen in the court-yard were dozing round the fire, except three or four of them who had become perfectly drunk and highly quarrelsome. The lanterns of the avenue had been extinguished, or rather had burned down. Occasionally a dim one was to be seen emitting more smoke than light.

"And this is what people call amusing themselves!" was the baron's philosophical remark, as he walked along. However just as he was passing through the gateway of the grounds he drew an old portfolio from his pocket and examined it by the light of the huge lantern hanging above. "Zounds!" he muttered.

"What is the matter?" asked Raymond.

"Did you leave any papers in the pocket of your overcoat?" asked the baron.

Raymond felt to see. "Yes," he replied, "two or three old letters and some visiting cards."

"So I fancied," answered the baron. "Well, what will you wager but that Mademoiselle Simone knows her discussion with her mother was overheard—and overheard by us, mind you?"

"I should be in despair if I thought so."

"Well, then, you may despair as much as you please, for nothing is more certain," rejoined the baron. "But come let us walk on, for we are heated, and the night is cool. I will prove the point to you: first, our overcoats were carefully taken from that room; next, my portfolio has been examined, and a servant was stationed near the door, which was locked."

This was clear enough, and Raymond could no longer doubt. "But why," asked he, "should you think it is the young lady who knows of our involuntary indiscretion—why not the duchess, or why not both of them?"

"You have me there!" answered the baron; "for in regard to these points I have no reasons, only a moral conviction. Still, if Madame de Maillefert had known that we possessed her secret, she would have been more civil to us out of fear—for she was hardly polite."

"True!" murmured Raymond.

"Now, how did the young lady treat you? I know she danced with you after refusing half a dozen other applications."

"Ah! sir."

"I know it, for I saw it," said the baron, laughing; but he instantly

recovered his gravity. "This noble duchess," he said in an irritated voice, "ought to be shorn of her sunny locks and dressed in a convict's garb for the rest of her days. And as for her amiable son, he ought to be sent on a voyage round the world, with a recommendation to the captain to let him feel the virtues of the cat-o'-nine tails." Then, with more moderation, he added: "If I were in your place, friend Delorge—if my good star put such a girl as this one in my path, I——"

"Well?"

"Well! She should be my wife in spite of everything. I would move mountains and scale abysses to win her. She should be my wife or my life would be a blank." He stopped short, being perhaps a little ashamed of his enthusiasm, and then suddenly, without choosing to hear Raymond's reply he exclaimed: "But here we are—and that idiot Bérú is coming down to open the door. Good-night. Sleep well. But you understand what I say—she should be my wife."

CATASTROPHE



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BY
EMILE GABORIAU

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THE CATASTROPHE.



Part IV.

MAILLEFERT.

I.

It was late when Raymond woke up. As it was Sunday, he told Master Béru not to rouse him, even for breakfast. The weather was superb. It was one of those splendid autumn mornings, frequent in the valley of the Loire—when a light mist hovers over the hills, and above the fading trees, which stretch as far as the eye can reach. Raymond opened his window, and the fresh air swept into his room. The high street of Rosiers was gay and noisy. High mass was just over, and groups of peasant girls stood outside the church chattering and laughing—their rosy faces shining with health under their white caps.

However, instead of busying himself with his toilette, Raymond installed himself in the cosy arm-chair which the innkeeper had brought from Saumur for his especial comfort, and remained buried in thought. The baron's last words still rang in his ears. "She should be my wife!" "Yes," he said, half aloud—"yes, she must be my wife!" He realised that it was of no use to fight any longer with himself—he knew that he loved Simone de Maillefert. He loved her with that all-absorbing love which sometimes takes possession of a man's faculties, which fills all his thoughts, and in fact his whole life, and, according to its success or defeat, makes him either the happiest or most wretched of mortals. But she—would she love him in return? He asked himself this question and thought of her blushes, the emotion he had read on her expressive face, and said to himself—"I am not indifferent to her!" and he experienced a thrill of hope.

Still he recalled what the baron had said, that the girl knew of his having undertaken her defence, and of his having fought with Bizet on her account. "Poor fool that I am," he said, "to take what is only commonplace gratitude for a token of serious interest." But as he was ready to scale mountains and disregard all obstacles for her sake, he determined to calmly weigh all his chances of success. Alas! they seemed to fade as he examined them, for even supposing that Simone loved him, what then?

He now knew enough respecting the family matters of the Mailleferts to feel convinced that the duchess and her son would, with all their strength and energy, oppose Simone's marriage to any one. Would not the poor child's

marriage deprive them of the enjoyment of her income, which was now their only resource? And, besides, he realized that this girl had consecrated her life to an overwhelming task. And he believed her heroic enough to eat her heart out rather than renounce watching over the honour of the family, and preserving her great name from the opprobrium to which it was constantly exposed by the mad prodigality of her mother and brother. Who was he, Raymond Dolorge, to dare to aspire to the hand of a girl of her beauty, rank, and wealth? A poor engineer, with only his salary and a modest inheritance to depend upon. And this was not all! What would his mother say when she heard of his love, his hopes, and projects? He could divine Madame Delorge's astonishment, he could even hear the words she would use. "Shame on you!" she would say, "have you forgotten your murdered father? Shame on you that you can think of personal happiness while Maumussy and Combelaïne still remain unpunished." And, as if to increase Raymond's sadness, his conscience pointed out to him the most extraordinary examples of tenacious fidelity. His mother, to begin with; then Madame Cornevin, who had brought up her five children and educated them so far above their station; then Léon Cornevin, who had retained all his indomitable will, even though his career had been blighted; and Jean, also, who had deserted country, friends, and family to search for his father, and recover the letter which General Delorge had written and confided to the care of the loyal and unfortunate groom. Was not Roberjot's conduct, and even that of timid M. Ducoudray, a cruel reproach to Raymond? "Yes, it is true," he said—"it is true that I am unworthy, and yet I love her. I am no longer master of myself, for I love her!"

The very excess of his enthusiasm recalled him to the consciousness that if he lingered much longer in his room the baron would come in person to summon him. Accordingly he hurried down stairs and found his friend holding court, as the baron himself termed it. Every Sunday after church he summoned Master Béru and cross-examined him with wonderful keenness and patience as to the peasants of the neighbourhood, declaring that he derived from his answers an immense amount of information which aided him in his work. He had just heard a peasant in the vicinity that had had his best meadows rendered utterly sterile for years by the inundation of 1866, when he caught sight of Raymond in the passage. He immediately abandoned Béru and several peasants who had joined the conference, and hurried after the young man. "What a lazy fellow you are!" he cried. "Do you know that I breakfasted an hour ago?" Near-sighted as he was, he could not help starting as he caught sight of Raymond's face. "Are you ill?" he asked.

"Not at all; I am only tired."

"Tired? With one ball—an innocent quadrille and a few glasses of mild punch!" And as Raymond did not reply, the baron looked at him for a moment. "Ah! I have it," he cried; "Mademoiselle de Maillefert——"

The entrance of Madame Béru with some fresh-laid eggs for Raymond's meal checked the good man. But when she had retired—"By my faith!" he continued, "I fail to see why the recollection of the most charming young girl in the world should give a lover such a funereal aspect."

"Alas!" sighed Raymond.

"You have discovered obstacles?"

"Insurmountable ones."

The old engineer shrugged his shoulders. "Upon my word," he muttered, "the young men of our day are easily discouraged. They are heroes

when the paths are smooth and flowery, but they are baffled and turn back at the first mole hill they encounter."

"Sir——"

"Just be quiet! You will only say that you like facile enterprises, but allow me to remark that one only achieves fame by scaling apparently inaccessible mountains. A man may be proud of having climbed Mont Blanc, but he does not say much of the Heights of Montmartre. When I was your age the impossible had charms for me; and even old as I am to-day, I believe in miracles. The sorceress who accomplishes them is at the bidding of us all. She is called 'Will.'"

He expressed his convictions in the tone of a man whose theories are not merely experimental ones. But Raymond's face did not brighten. "If you knew, sir," he began, "all that I have to struggle against."

He was in one of those moods when the most treasured secrets rise to the lips, and if the old engineer had realized this he would soon have learned the mystery which had so troubled him. But just then he was occupied with the practical side of the affair. "The truth is, my boy," he began, "while you were dancing with the daughter, I yielded to the temptation of teasing the mother. It was a stupid thing to do, and she wished me six feet under ground. The end being that we shall never be asked again to the château, and you are cut adrift from the young lady!" He smoked his pipe for a few moments in silence, and then he added; "I suppose we ought to make our peace, but how? That is indeed the puzzle. I must go back now to my good people, who are growing impatient, but later on we will have another little talk."

When Raymond had finished breakfasting he lighted a cigar and went out. It was, he said to himself, merely to enjoy the air and the sunshine, and to be alone. Only chance led him to the other side of the Loire, and induced him to take a little path which wound up a hill, whence he could look down on the Maillefert gardens and a portion of the park. From the spot where he had stationed himself he could see the various guests who had come with the duchess from Paris, walking up and down the balconies and leaning over the railings. There were a dozen of them or more, men and women, and from their lively gestures, it was easy to see that they did not find the time hang heavy on their hands. For the first time Raymond felt a pang of envy. He envied the young men whom he saw laughing and talking. They, at least, were on good terms with the duchess, and her door was readily opened to them. He himself had a right to call at the château to be sure, or rather it was his duty to call there now, but he was quite sure that when he presented himself some insolent lackey would tell him that the ladies do not receive. He would have nothing else to do but to hand the man his card, and that would be the end of it. However he was somewhat consoled by not seeing Simone. Where was she? He was indulging in vague surmises when strangely enough he obtained an indirect answer from two peasants who were talking together by the side of the road. They seemed somewhat jolly, and wore their Sunday garments.

"Hallo, Bruneau!" said one of them. "Where are you going?"

"To the château."

"What! On Sunday? You won't see the young lady to-day."

"Yes, I shall, for it's on Sunday that she sees her farmers, so as not to disturb them on other days."

"And what are you going to the château for?"

"To take some money there."

"Why, I thought you only paid your rent at Christmas time."

"And so I do, but the young lady asked me and two or three others to pay her half in advance this year."

"And you are going to do so?"

"I am going to do better. I am taking her the whole."

"I suppose if she asked you for two years in advance, you would take her five?"

"I should try to oblige her, I'm sure."

"And your wife—what does she say?"

"She says that if I had to borrow money, I must do it, as Mademoiselle Simone wants it. Madame Bruneau remembers one night when she was so ill that she could not move hand or foot, and the baby had the croup. The young lady came on horseback through a driving rain, and then went to Saumur for the medicine the doctor ordered."

The other had nothing to say to this, and so the men separated.

"What can have happened," thought Raymond, "that Mademoiselle de Maillefert is reduced to ask for advances from her tenants? What new folly of her mother's is she compelled to repair, or what new iniquity of her brother's is she forced to hide?" And his heart ached as he thought of the poor young creature, harassed and preyed upon by these cormorants. She must have an iron will to resist their entreaties so long. But the day would surely come, when wearied in soul and body by this atrocious combat, she would say: "Take it all; spend it, throw it away—and with it the honour of our house!" It was with unspeakable joy that Raymond thought of the possible ruin of Simone de Maillefert. When that day came, he would be near her, and then he might confess his love without being suspected of a shameful speculation.

Such were his thoughts as he walked back towards the inn. He had just reached the suspension bridge when he heard himself called, and on turning he perceived the redoubtable Bizet, with his arm in a sling. "Good morning!" exclaimed the young provincial. "I hear you were at the ball last night. I congratulate you. You have conquered, it seems. The statue is animated! Her beautiful eyes look tenderly upon you! She danced, and smiled! It was quite a wonder. Oh, I have heard all about it!"

Raymond calculated the height of the bridge and the depth of the water—and had great difficulty in restraining himself from pitching Bizet over the parapet.

"Come now," continued his companion, "what is the use of being so reserved with a friend—for we are friends. Two men who have tried to kill each other are always friends for life. When is the marriage coming off?"

"Good morning!" said Raymond, and he marched away, leaving Bizet looking after him with an expression of wonder and indignation on his face.

Raymond was intensely annoyed; from what this young fellow had said he could judge what inferences had been drawn by the persons who saw Simone reject partner after partner and then accept himself. He realized that if all this gossip reached the duchess it would only give her another reason for closing her doors on him. This, too, was the opinion of the baron to whom he confided his fears. "I wish to heaven," cried Raymond, "that I had Bizet in the field again. I would certainly nail him to a tree."

The baron frowned. "And you would make a great mistake! Your dear Bizet is only a fool, and as fools are in the majority in this world, it is of little use to try and exterminate them. Let us rather endeavour to find some way to make our peace at the château."

But they found none, although they spent the whole evening thinking it over. And night, that counsellor divine, sent them no inspiration. Raymond was, therefore, rather dismal on the next day when he returned with the baron to the scene of their operations.

They were then finishing some soundings near Les Tuffeaux at a point where the Loire winds so closely to the slopes that they are merely separated by a narrow field and a road cut up by the constant passage of heavily laden carts.

The morning passed quickly, and about three o'clock, while they partook of luncheon and rested near the road, one of their assistants exclaimed: "Hallo! Here comes Madame de Maillefert and her party!"

The baron and Raymond started to their feet; and only a few yards away, at a point where the road skirted some huge moss-grown rocks, they espied seven or eight persons, of either sex, on horseback, who were slowly riding towards them. In front came the duchess, attired in a close-fitting riding-habit and her yellow hair arranged with studied carelessness under her tall hat. On reaching the baron and his companion she reined in her horse, and in her most gracious manner bid them good morning. "I surprise you at work, baron," she said, addressing M. de Boursonne.

The latter was never over-pleased when his title struck his ear; but on this occasion sacrificing himself on the shrine of his young friends's hopes, he assumed his very best smile and gaily replied: "Yes, madame—but we have nearly finished for to-day."

"And our lovely valley will owe you an eternal debt of gratitude if you succeed in rescuing it from the Loire."

"We are doing our best, madame—my young comrade Delorge and I."

This reply was intended to give Raymond an opportunity of mingling in the conversation. But the young fellow did not avail himself of it. He noticed but one thing, that Madambiselle Simone was not of the party.

The young duke was there in a light gray coat, a huge stiff shirt collar, and one of those small felt hats with a blue ribbon and a green-gauze veil, turned round the brim, which the emperor had just brought into vogue. He now spoke, and asked Raymond, "Are you doing all this work to prevent inundations?"

"Ours is a preparatory work."

"Curious! very curious!" answered the young nobleman, and making his horse leap the ditch as he spoke, he found himself in the meadow by Raymond's side.

The duke was less preposterous on horseback than on foot. His chest seemed less hollow and his shoulders less rounded; and as Béru had said, he was thoroughly at home when mounted, and when he was thrown, it was in a sportsmanlike way, of which he rather boasted. He rode about examining all the instruments, and seemed as astonished by all he saw as if he had been a thorough savage. "Curious! very curious," he repeated,

In the meantime Madame de Maillefert was talking to the baron. "This work must be prodigiously expensive," she said.

"Yes, madame; it will cost several millions."

She turned towards a beautiful brunette, who was with her, and said in a sentimental tone: "How is it possible for a country not to cherish a government which spends so much money in view of insuring its prosperity?"

But she had no time to say more, for her son at this moment returned to her side. "On my honour, mother, you should come here on foot some day

to see these gentlemen use their instruments. It is very odd—very curious indeed—upon my honour it is!”

“We will certainly come again,” replied the duchess; “but in the meantime I hope we shall see these gentlemen at the château.” It was to the baron she spoke, but it was at Raymond she smiled.

“We always have a game of cards in the evening,” remarked the duke encouragingly.

His mother now gathered up her reins. “We shall expect you this evening, gentlemen,” she said; and without waiting for a reply, she touched her horse with her whip, and was off.

“No dress coats!” called the duke over his shoulder; “remember that!”

They were far away before Raymond and the baron had recovered from their surprise, and were able to ask each other what this last piece of politeness indicated. Was it possible to attribute it to chance—to one of those fancies that pass through such a brain as that of the Duchess de Maillefert ten times a day? No; it couldn’t be that. Each detail of the scene indicated deliberate premeditation, and the words and conduct of mother and son alike betrayed a concerted plan. It was clear that they wished to arrive at intimacy with the two engineers. But why, with what object? “They are bored with each other probably,” said Raymond.

“Do you mean,” asked the baron, with a satirical laugh, “that our noble hosts rely on us to amuse their guests by the charms of our conversation?” So saying he caught Raymond’s arm, and whirled him round. “Look me in the white of the eye. Now then, do you know what notion I have taken into my head? It is that the duchess wants you to marry her daughter.”

Raymond’s face flushed. “Your jesting is cruel,” said he.

“I am not jesting.”

“Then you forgot that the duchess and her son are living on Mademoiselle Simone’s income, and naturally don’t wish her to marry.”

“I know it would be their ruin, at least in appearance; but appearances are deceitful. We will soon find out. We shall accept their invitation, shall we not?”

Raymond hesitated. “I hardly know,” he replied.

The baron laughed aloud, and clapping his young friend on the shoulder, he exclaimed: “Hypocrite! hypocrite!”

It was quite true, however, that Raymond was hesitating. Like one of those excitable sportsmen who, when the game rises, becomes so dazzled and nervous he can see nothing, Raymond was never quite able to profit of opportunities. However, at the last moment, just after dinner, the baron asked him, “Shall we go?”

Raymond had not decided; but driven into a corner, he almost involuntarily answered, “Yes, we will go.”

The duchess received them in a small room on the first floor. She half rose from her chair as they entered, extended both hands, and exclaimed: “Welcome, gentlemen!” while the duke flew to them and shook hands as if they had been long lost brothers.

“What the deuce does it mean?” thought the baron. But Raymond never gave it a thought. He was looking at Simone, sitting beside the beautiful brunette, whom he had already seen on horseback with the duchess, and his heart sank as he espied the look of utter surprise with which she surveyed him. “She knows nothing of her mother’s invitation,” he thought. “She did not know I was coming this evening.”

Following the baron's example, he bowed to all the ladies in the drawing-room, and then turned towards three young men, who were laughing and talking with Philippe by the chimney-piece, on which stood an open liquor case. One of those pianists who might be taken for barbers, with their well-combed, well-oiled hair, and who go from château to château all summer in search of some *grande dame* inclined to cultivate their talents sat before the instrument and was playing a rhythmical air. But music had no charms for the young Duke de Maillfert, and he profited by the entrance of our friends to say to the pianist: "Lovely! A charming melody! Yes, on my word! But if you have no objection, we will rest there for to-night."

With the sad resignation of unappreciated genius, the performer closed the piano and leaned against the case. "Ladies and gentlemen," continued Philippe, "as we have an addition to our circle to-night, suppose we have a game of cards—a little *bac*."

"Oh! not baccarat!" exclaimed one of the ladies; "that's a man's game, and it is sure to end in a quarrel. Let us play roulette."

"Oh! yes, roulette," said another lady.

"That is to say that you want another opportunity to empty my pockets," cried the duke, with a laugh. "But I have no objection." And thereupon he rang the bell. "Bring the roulette," he said to the footman who appeared in answer to the summons.

Raymond fancied that every eye was turned mockingly upon him, and he dared not look at Simone. However, the servants brought in the roulette, and arranged it on a table. "To our places!" cried the duke: "we are wasting a great deal of precious time."

Everybody gathered round the table with the exception of the baron. "Will you not join us?" asked the duchess, graciously. "Don't you play?"

"Never, madame."

"Curious that! Upon my word, that is very curious. And why, pray?"

"Because I am afraid of losing."

The reply was rather equivocal, and the duchess promptly asked, "Do you think we play for the sake of winning?"

"Certainly I do," replied the old gentleman, with his usual imperturbability.

M. Philippe having declared that he should sustain the bank with his last farthing, installed himself before a pile of money, and imitating the monotonous, drawling tone of the Rhineland croupiers exclaimed: "Make your game, gentlemen and ladies—make your game."

Chance, assisted by the baron, perhaps, or by the duchess, had placed Raymond between Simone and the brunette with beautiful eyes. The baron fancied that he noticed some significant glances and furtive smiles as the young girl came towards the table. "Did you ever play roulette, sir?" asked the brunette, of Raymond, as Philippe pressed the spring.

"Never madame."

"Then let me show you," and she briefly explained the principles of the game. The ball stopped. "You have lost!" cried the duke. "You are a very bad adviser, duchess."

He spoke to the brunette. She is a duchess, too, thought Raymond. But what did he care? He only wanted a chance to say a word to Simone. But what could he say? What commonplace remarks should he utter? He thought, too, that Simone was equally anxious to speak to him, and he paid no attention to the fact that he had already lost once or twice. Everybody

was laughing round the table, and Raymond would have given words to have been able to say anything. "My vicinity does not seem to bring you good luck," murmured the brunette.

Raymond bowed awkwardly, in a rage at his own stupidity.

"Come ladies and gentlemen—make your game!" cried the duke again. This time the brunette lost on the red. "Upon my word, duchess," said one of the young men, "you will be penniless soon. You had better write to Monsieur de Maumussy to send you some money."

"Maumussy!" Had he heard aright? Raymond asked himself, and he felt faint and ill. Could this woman be the Duchess de Maumussy?

"Oh!" said one lady, "the Duke de Maumussy is not like certain husbands of my acquaintance—he does not wait for his wife to ask for money! Not he!"

There was no more room for doubt. Raymond mechanically responded to the call of the noble croupier, and pursued his train of thought.

"Chance favours you now," said the Duchess de Maumussy. "Shall we go into partnership?"

Raymond started back in horror, but with a great effort of self control he managed to murmur in a faint voice: "Oh, certainly, with pleasure."

He was filled with a wild longing to fly. Ah! if he could only get away without a scene. Fortunately, the baron was watching him and perceived that something had gone wrong, so when tea and some light refreshments were brought at ten o'clock, he said: "Come my dear Delorge, we must be off." Madame de Maillefert wished to retain them, but he pleaded urgent work on the morrow, promised to return again very shortly, and went off with Raymond.

When they were outside, the worthy old fellow asked: "My boy, what is the matter? Your arm trembles like a leaf."

"I cannot talk now, sir," was the reply.

They reached the Rising Sun in profound silence. M. Béru was waiting for them, and on seeing Raymond, he said: "The postman has brought you two letters from Paris. There they are."

Raymond took the letters without a word of thanks, and passed up the stairs with an uncertain tread. The innkeeper noticed this, and asked if he were ill. "Oh, no," replied the baron, but as he entered his chamber he muttered: "What the deuce has gone wrong between the boy and his lady-love?" For he thought that no one but Simone could have put Raymond into such a state. "The lady, on the other side, was very pretty," he resumed, "and she looked at him with very loving eyes, but he answered her once in a very odd way."

His pipe was finished, and he knocked out the ashes. "It may have been nothing after all," he reflected: "that young fellow is as nervous as a girl. I dare say he is sound asleep by this time."

II.

BUT Raymond was not asleep. He was sitting in an arm-chair trying to collect his ideas. "How weak I am!" he muttered. "How cowardly!"

Poor boy! He was neither weak nor cowardly. He was the victim of a situation which he had not created, of a Past which he dragged about with him, as a prisoner drags his chain. Madame Delorge had not realized that it is impossible to limit a man to one idea, no matter how vast it may be.

She had not understood that, while her own life was virtually ended, her son's was but beginning; that if all were dead in her, everything in him was new-born. She had not said to herself that, in imposing this superhuman task upon him, she ran the risk of making him loathe it, when a great passion overtook him—when his love and what he called his duty might be at variance.

"No," he said to himself, "I do not forget that my father was murdered in the basest manner. I would give my life to bring his murderers to justice. But I love Mademoiselle Simone, and must I give up seeing her, because Madame de Maumussy is at the Château de Maillefert? How is Madame de Maumussy guilty? She may have been married greatly against her will to this miserable adventurer."

As he spoke he turned the letters he had received to and fro in his hands. One of them came from Roberjot, the other from his mother. He hesitated to open them, having a presentiment that he might find they contained something calculated to crush the hopes which were becoming so dear to him. "Nevertheless, I must read them," he murmured, at last, and broke the seal of his mother's letter first.

"Dear Raymond—The hour of our vengeance is close at hand. I feel it myself, and all our friends believe it. What proves to me that the empire is crumbling is that your father's old friends, who seemed to have forgotten our existence, have all come back to see me. All Paris is absorbed in a very scandalous suit which has been brought against Monsieur de Maumussy by his wife's family. It has been said that De Combeldaine—more ruined than ever—was on the point of marrying Madame Cornevin's unworthy sister, Flora Misri, when the marriage was broke off at the last moment for some most disgraceful reasons. Raymond, my beloved son, remember your father. Keep yourself free from all entanglements, and be ready to act at any moment. Your sister, Pauline, and I, kiss you warmly.—ELIZABETH DELORGE."

"Free! ready to act!" murmured Raymond, with a bitter laugh. "I have lived so for twenty years!" And he opened the lawyer's letter. "I have but one moment," wrote that gentleman, to copy a letter which I have just received from Jean. Read and you will see if the brave fellow is losing his time."

Jean wrote as follows:—"Dear Friends:—After a frightful voyage, during which we should have been drowned, but for the aid of an English clipper, we have at last reached Australia. It was Sunday—the day before yesterday—that I first trod the streets of Melbourne. I at once sought out the man with whom my father left Chili—Pécheira, the smuggler's son. I found his house without the least difficulty, for he is now one of the leading merchants in Melbourne. But he himself was at the mines, and the manager I saw could give me no idea of the probable date of his return. Still this same man said he knew that when Pécheira first came to Australia he was accompanied by a Frenchman named Boutin. I am certain that this Boutin was my father, Laurent Cornevin, and I am convinced that Pécheira can tell me what has become of him. This makes me very happy—for I see the beginning of the end. When our ancestors wished to achieve a difficult task, they imposed upon themselves some rude penance which was a perpetual stimulant. I have therefore sworn that I will never touch brush or palette until I take my father in my arms if he be living, or until I have prayed on his tomb if he be dead. So you may hope my friends, that you will see me soon.—JEAN CORNEVIN."

It was with deep discouragement that Raymond dropped this letter. "If I were not mad," he said, "if I had one ray of courage, I should never enter the Château de Maillefert again." He was, alas! one of those unfortunate beings who are nailed by their imaginations on some chimerical Calvary, who look far in advance of events, and suffer more terribly from the catastrophes they picture to themselves than from real misfortunes.

After a night of struggle his resolution was taken. "I will never try to see Mademoiselle Simone again—never—not if the sacrifice kills me!" he swore.

When he went down to breakfast he was sustained by that bitter satisfaction that a man feels in having conquered some terrible temptation, and his face was composed and smiling. He expected a thousand questions, attacks and jests; but, to his infinite surprise, the baron said nothing, for, to tell the truth, the old gentleman was very acute. He saw that the young fellow's sufferings had been real and intense. "It is clear," he said to himself, "that there is more than I suspected—more than a love affair!"

But precisely because this was his conviction, he was the more careful not to refer to the events of the previous evening—that is not refer to them directly. He felt that Raymond was anxious to keep his secret, and each word he spoke was pre-arranged to tempt his young friend to confession. For instance in talking of the approaching completion of this section of their work, he found an opportunity of remarking that they would soon leave Rosiers. But instead of noting sadness on Raymond's face, he only detected a kind of gloomy joy.

"I wish we could go off to-morrow!" was the young man's reply, spoken in a tone of heartfelt sincerity. He meant what he said. He wished that material obstacles of sea and land might separate him from Mademoiselle Simone, and thus effectually prevent his yielding to temptation.

"I do not understand the fellow!" muttered the baron, who was not altogether actuated by curiosity in his wish to penetrate Raymond's secret. He knew the young man to be so inexperienced, so loyal, and so disposed to believe in the loyalty of others, that he felt him to be an easy dupe—one of those simple fellows who fall into all the snares which are spread out for them. "If he would only trust me," thought the worthy old engineer—"if he would allow himself to be guided by my experience, like a blind man by his chain, he would be freed from all his entanglements. Heaven knows where they will lead him! and the boy is too confoundedly proud to tell his old chief."

This idea worried him so much that he hardly ate any breakfast, and swallowed his coffee so hot that he burned his mouth, and ended by getting into a most abominable temper. He lighted his pipe, and took a seat on one of the stone benches in front of the Rising Sun, beside Madame Béru, who was enjoying the balmy air, with her hands placidly folded over her fat stomach. "I am positively too good and too kind," he said to Raymond. "Our men take advantage of me. There is not one of them here yet."

Raymond ventured to say a word in defence. "But you know that we are never as early as this."

"What if we are not? It is their business to be on the spot waiting for us; and in future they shall be, or I'll know the reason why!"

From time to time the baron was apt to issue these terrible decrees, but the real goodness of his character speedily caused him to annul them. However, he was discontentedly ruminating anent his delinquents, when at the end of the street he saw a groom wearing the Maillefert livery coming

towards the inn at a rapid trot. At this sight his good humour returned to him. "I will bet you any amount," he said, "that yonder magnificent being is coming to us."

Nor was he mistaken. When the servant reached the Rising Sun, he drew up his horse, and addressing Madame Bérú, he asked if M. Delorge were there. Raymond stepped forward while the servant dismounted, and drew an envelope from his belt. "I was told to give this to you, sir."

"Is there an answer required?"

"I think not, sir," and the man swung himself into his saddle again and rode off.

Raymond looked at the letter with a strange reluctance to open it. At last he made a mighty effort, and as he tore it open, a quantity of bank-notes fluttered out.

"What the deuce is that!" exclaimed the old engineer.

The letter was written in a very delicate hand, on thick paper. Raymond read it at a glance: "Sir—You left so hastily that we did not settle our accounts. We were partners, if you remember. After your departure I continued playing—thinking that you would not care much if I lost our common stock. Instead of losing, however, I was favoured by the most insolent good luck, and gained two thousand eight hundred francs, of which I send you your half. You see, our partnership brought us good luck

"DUCHESS DE MAUMUSSY."

Raymond turned pale. "Oh! this is too much!" he gasped. And in a transport of rage he crushed the letter and the bank-notes together. "Madame Bérú," he said, in a hoarse voice.

"Sir?"

"Your priest is a worthy man, I believe?"

"Oh! the best in the world, sir; charitable to a degree, and stinting himself for the poor."

"Very well, then, take him this for his poor parishioners." And he tossed the letter and the bank-notes into the apron of the worthy woman, who was stunned with astonishment. Never were eyes so comically anxious as those with which she looked from the money to the baron, who, to tell the truth, was quite as astonished as the woman herself.

"Do you think that Monsieur Delorge was in jest?" she asked, as soon as the young man was out of sight.

"No, I don't," answered the baron.

"But it's such a big sum. What will the *cure* think?"

"You had better wait a little. Let me see," and the baron adroitly withdrew the letter, leaving only the bank-notes in the woman's apron.

"I think," he muttered, "that I had better order a straight-jacket for my maniac. What does this money mean?"

The letter he held would explain everything he thought, but, curious as he was, the idea never occurred to him of reading it. He hurried after Raymond, whom he found in the dining-room drinking a glass of water. "You are too generous, my boy!" he cried, as he went in.

"Eh, sir?" said the young man; "why the money scorched my hands, and I have sent it to the only destination it could have."

The old engineer shrugged his shoulders. "Very good," he said. "But did you know that you gave the letter also to Mother Bérú?"

"And what of that?"

"Simply that every villager would have seen it before twenty-four hours elapsed."

"It is of no consequence, sir—the whole world might read it."

The baron did not wait an instant longer, but with the most eager curiosity and rapt attention he read and re-read the letter. "Well," he said at last with a mocking smile, "I know more than one exquisite who would be taken off his feet by a note like this, and its intoxicating perfume."

"Sir!"

"She is a lovely creature, this young duchess, with her beautiful eyes, which are soft and flashing by turns."

Raymond started up: "Don't ever speak to me of that woman again, sir!" he cried. "She fills me with horror. Yes, with horror," he repeated. "It is the greatest misfortune for me that I ever met her, and I know perfectly well that she will some day be fatal to me."

As was customary with the baron, he did not allow his impressions of this affair to be seen. "We must start," he said hastily; "we have no time to lose."

They left the room together, and on their way out the baron heard Raymond tell Madame Béru to carry the money at once to the priest. Then they proceeded to their duties. However, important as the day's work was for the old engineer, he performed it with limited attention, for he was forming his plans for the evening.

"Let us go to Maillefert," he said when dinner was over.

"I don't feel quite well to-night," Raymond replied.

"Never mind. Come with me and be cheered up."

"No, it's impossible."

"To-morrow, then——"

"No, not to-morrow, either."

"Do you think that because you won a heavy sum at the house you never ought to go there again? What will they think of you?"

"Just what they please," answered Raymond, coldly. "Their opinions are profoundly indifferent to me."

"And Mademoiselle Simone?"

Raymond turned pale. "Why do you find so much satisfaction in tormenting me?" he asked.

"Good night," rejoined the baron, as he left the room, annoyed by the young man's reproaches. "I shall go to the château to-night for his sake," he muttered, "and we will see if the people there are as discreet as he is."

Five minutes later he was walking up the avenue. As on the evening before, the duchess was seated in the small drawing-room on the first floor, but fewer persons were with her. Several had left that morning, and Philippe had gone to Angers with a friend for forty-eight hours. However, the young Duchess de Maumussy was there, sitting by Simone's side on the sofa, facing the door. She wore a black dress, with poppy-coloured ruffles, and a cluster of red pinks, the last of the season, bedecked her hair. Her theatrical beauty was dazzling on this occasion. Her eyes emitted phosphorescent gleams through their fringed lashes, and her skin was exquisite with its pearly reflections. Simone's pale refined beauty looked wan beside her's, and, moreover, the young girl seemed weary.

"I am truly glad to see you," said Madame de Maillefert when the baron was announced. "But you are alone," she added, with a tinge of disappointment in her voice; "what has become of Monsieur Delorge?"

"He is poorly," said the baron, in a melancholy tone. "Very poorly, indeed."

He had provided himself with his glasses before he said this, and he

watched Simone and the young duchess keenly as he spoke. He saw them start and exchange involuntary glances. "Good!" he said to himself, "that's one point."

Unfortunately he had no time to profit by what he felt to be a discovery, for two noblemen from the neighbourhood, with their wives, now entered the room. They had bitten at the bait offered by the duchess, and, after disapproving of the Imperial government for eighteen years, they decided, in 1869, to change and adhere to it. They made certain conditions, it is true, for one of them asked to be the ministerial candidate at the approaching elections, while the other wished to be made a prefect. "These people," thought the baron, "are rather late in the day in their change of political opinions." Then, seeing that Simone had vacated her seat beside Madame de Maumussy, he quietly made his way towards it.

"I will confess the fair penitent," he said to himself, as he carefully framed his questions. But his diplomacy was needless, and he speedily became convinced, almost immediately acquired the certainty, that she had never seen Raymond before this visit to Maillefert. As if the old gentleman had not been almost a total stranger to her, she began to talk of her native land, Italy, and her family, relating all her past life with surprising frankness. The baron was astonished, although he had formerly lived in Rome and Florence, and retained vivid recollection of the ingenuousness of Italian women, and their horror of affectation and prudery.

The young Duchess de Maumussy knew nothing of the world, and she acknowledged it with great sincerity, mentioning that she had spent twenty years in a convent at Naples, where she had a very dull time of it she said. One fine morning, however, her father told her he had found a husband for her, a great French lord, who, in exchange for her enormous dowry, would assist his wife's family with his political influence. In a fortnight she was Duchess de Maumussy. She had made no objections. In fact she was very grateful to be released from the convent. She had been dazzled by her change of position—by the bustle of the paternal mansion succeeding to the quiet of the cloister—by the lovely toilettes of her marriage trousseau, and the flattering words murmured in her ear. When all this pleasing bewilderment was over it was too late. It was not that she had any reason to complain of her husband. The Duke de Maumussy was perfect—attentive to her slightest wishes, always seeing that her purse was full, specifying for pin-money on her behalf in all his negotiations, and providing her with the finest diamonds and most gorgeous equipages in Paris. Thus was she loved and envied on all sides. She spoke of her husband with affection—only he was not the husband she had dreamed of when she talked with her young friends in Naples. The duke was elegant and witty, tenderly sentimental or ironically so, as the fancy took him. But he was thirty years older than she was; he might have been her father. He was old and she was young. She often doubted if she were married, for sometimes three or four days elapsed without her seeing him. Politics and business absorbed his days and pleasure devoured his nights. So that under the spur of ambition or the lash of necessity he led a most restless existence. He allowed her entire liberty, and made such a parade of doing so that she sometimes felt humiliated by her independence.

It was in the most simple and natural tone that she confided all this to the baron, who said to himself: "She is too artless by far. What is her purpose in telling me these things? For me to repeat them to Raymond? Singular commission!"

He saw that he was not alone in hearing what the young duchess said, for Simone had returned and taken a chair close by. One of the other ladies began to talk to her, but Simone's thoughts were evidently elsewhere. She heard—was indeed listening to what Madame de Maumassy was saying, and she did not lose one word of it. Her cheeks became even paler, and her eyes flashed fire as she listened.

"Both these women love the boy," thought the baron. "They have discovered it, and they hate each other. But why? and why has he fled? Was he afraid to choose?"

At this moment the long-haired pianist, who had been taking an inspiring walk by moonlight, sat down at the piano, and as the duke was not there, he soon filled the room with the sounds of the instrument.

The old engineer profited by this occasion to take his leave, with a feeling of satisfaction, but a little doubtful whether he ought to speak to Raymond of his discoveries or not. On the whole, he decided that it would be wiser to remain silent, at least for the time being. It was clear that the young man was very unhappy; in truth, his determination not to return to Maillefert cost him dear. To feel that he had but to extend his hand and reach the happiness he longed for, was almost unbearable. He could not leave the Rising Sun without seeing the terraces of Maillefert, and the white front of the château through the trees on the other side of the Loire. He had almost decided either to ask for a change or to resign, when on the following Sunday, after mass, while the baron was as usual holding court, he went out and turned his steps towards the slope overlooking the gardens of Maillefert.

At a turn of the road he found himself face to face with Simone. She was not alone, for she had her English governess, Miss Lydia Dodge, a tall angular person, with a red nose and pale face, beside her. Simone must have just left church, for the governess carried two prayer books. Confused to such a degree that his limbs trembled under him, Raymond stood still; and as the young girl, equally disturbed, also stopped, they stood looking at each other in such embarrassment that Miss Lydia could not conceal her astonishment.

It was Simone who spoke first. "You have been ill, I think," she said, in a low voice. "I trust you are better!"

"Thank you."

"And that we shall soon see you at the château."

Miss Lydia now said a few words in English, but the girl did not seem to hear them; for she did not reply to her governess.

But she added to Raymond "I hope you will come."

Miss Lydia coughed, and thought it advisable to interfere. "Is this the gentleman," she asked, "who has just given fourteen hundred francs to the poor of Rosiers?"

Raymond started.

"How did you know that, mademoiselle?" he asked.

"Because the priest has just said so."

"Do you mean that he mentioned my name?"

"No," said Simone; "but he described you so well that the grateful poor recognized you at once." And as Miss Lydia drew her on, she added:

"Let us soon see you, sir."

Bewildered, as by an apparition, Raymond stood looking after the two ladies as long as he could see them. Then heaving a long sigh, he murmured: "I could make her love me, I am sure of it."

To persist in his previous resolutions with such a hope in his heart, the

young man must have been very differently made from what he was. "It is no use to struggle against Destiny!" he said, aloud—and these words admitted his defeat. "I shall remain!" he added, in a defiant tone.

All recollection of the task he had undertaken, the remembrance of his murdered father, and the unpunished assassins, the fear of his mother's cutting reproaches, the thought of the disapproval and surprise of his friends—the Cornevins, Roberjot and Ducoudray, everything vanished, and while he retraced his steps to the Rising Sun, he said: "What does it matter if Simone loves me!"

Like an invalid who is determined not to think of his fatal malady, Raymond resolved not to brood over the past, and so at dinner, his face was gay and hopeful. Instead of sitting silently wrapped in dreary thought he talked and laughed, and, when coffee was served, he said to the baron: "Shall we go to Maillefert this evening?"

The old engineer started, and after examining his young companion with some curiosity, and noticing the strange excited look in his eyes, he answered, quietly: "Yes, let us go!"

A warm welcome awaited Raymond at Maillefert. An old friend of the family could not have been better received. The duchess actually rose from her seat and advanced to meet him, saying:

"Here comes our convalescent. Do you know that we have been very uneasy about you?"

The duke who had returned from Angers, paused in a scandalous story he was telling to one of his friends, to shake hands with his dear Delorge. "We have missed you fearfully," he said, "on my honour we have."

Raymond, who was now in the possession of all his faculties, asked himself the reason of this surprising cordiality from mother and son, and wondered what could be their aim, for surely they must have one. With this thought he set himself on his guard. He looked at Simone, who as usual was very quietly dressed. Indeed, she always wore the simplest of toilettes, toilettes which looked almost poor by the side of those adorning her mother's friends, but she was radiant that night; her fair hair was almost luminous, and her eyes and complexion were absolutely brilliant. She reminded one of some portrait painted by the Titian, which had long hung in a corner in the shade, and was now suddenly brought forward into the light. "I did not really see her the other evening," thought the baron, "or it is an absolute transfiguration."

The Duchess de Maumussy struck him as less beautiful. Seated at a little lacquer table, she seemed absorbed in reading a number of the *Vie Parisienne*; but her eyes were really fixed on Raymond with an expression which, had he seen it, would have startled him.

"I think we had better have a little *bac*," said the young duke.

But the proposal was not a happy one, for that evening Madame de Maillefert had invited five or six noble ladies of the neighbourhood whom she was particularly anxious to enlist in her election projects, and this word "*bac*" caused them to compress their lips with disapproval. With a glance at her son, the duchess quickly rejoined: "No—no cards to-night; let us rather have a little dance."

The pianist, who sat dreaming in a corner, frowned, for he knew what a frightful task would now be his. He saw himself, the inspired but unappreciated genius, condemned, and not for the first time either, to play common-place dance music for the amusement of Madame de Maillefert's guests. He beheld himself, the composer of admirable melodies, reduced to

playing Offenbach, Hervé, and such like. However he dared not refuse, so he rose with a melancholy, martyr-like look, and walked to the instrument. "Play us a quadrille from 'Orphée aux Enfers,' " said his hostess.

Raymond at once asked Simone to dance with him. She hesitated before accepting the invitation, and her lips parted as if to say something; but she saw that all eyes were fixed on her, and so without more ado she accepted.

Raymond had sworn to himself that on this occasion he would not remain stupidly silent as he had done at the ball—and kept his word; but Simone did not seem to hear him. She only had eyes for the Duchess de Maumussy, who was dancing with Philippe de Maillefert.

When the quadrille was over, and as Raymond led her to her seat, she said, rapidly and in an almost inaudible voice: "You must dance with the Duchess de Maumussy!"

He looked at her in amazement. "You must," she repeated, and her eyes plainly asked: "Are you afraid?"

It is certain that she could have breathed no more distasteful command, for Raymond upon his way to the chateau had thought to himself: "I can contrive to avoid that woman."

However, he meekly obeyed Mademoiselle Simone, and went towards the duchess. Before he opened his lips, she rose and took his arm, as if she had been waiting for him. After a formidable series of chords the unappreciated pianist attacked a waltz. No retreat was possible, so surmounting his repugnance, Raymond encircled the slender waist of the young duchess; she placed her exquisitely gloved hand on his shoulder, and they waltzed off. At first they moved but slowly, but as the pianist quickened the measure, they turned with increasing rapidity. Raymond's brain was strangely bewildered by the motion of the waltz. He forgot where he was, and wondered if he were not a prey to one of those horrible nightmares which make sleep a torture. "Can it be I," he asked himself, "holding the wife of one of my father's murderers in my arms!"

However, they had only taken a few turns more when she asked him to stop, saying she was fatigued, although her breathing seemed as easy as that of a sleeping child. Raymond on his side was out of breath, and his forehead was covered with drops of perspiration.

"Do you know," exclaimed Madame de Maumussy, abruptly, "that the report of your magnificent alms has come to Maillefert?" She laughed; but it was not a pleasant laugh; and without waiting for an answer she continued: "You are very rich, then?"

"Alas! no, madame."

"Then your generosity is all the more creditable!" But this was not what her black eyes said, for they haughtily asked: "Why have you given away precisely the sum that I sent you?"

Raymond instantly understood that unless he wished to make her his enemy, he must find some plausible excuse; and so inspired by necessity, he replied: "I played the other night—for the first time in my life, madame. When I received your letter, I was in an agony of fear lest I had lost. What would have become of me in that case—I, who am but a poor engineer? so I trembled, lest this money so easily and rapidly acquired, might inspire me with a fatal passion for play. And if I gave it to the poor, it was so that I might have the right never to touch a card again, and yet not incur the risk of having it said that I feared losing my winnings."

As Raymond proceeded with this plausible explanation, the duchess's face resumed its usual expression. "This is the truth?" she asked.

"Ah, madame, why should I tell you a falsehood?"

She smiled instead of speaking: and as the music had finished, she took Raymond's arm to return to the seat which she had previously occupied. He already fancied himself free, and was manoeuvring to return to Simone; but the duchess swiftly commenced talking again, so that he could not possibly leave her without showing excessive rudeness. Taking as her text what he had said about being a poor engineer, Madame de Maumussy questioned him concerning his affairs in the most friendly manner. How long was it since he had left the Polytechnic School? Where had he been? Was his position in accordance with his merits? Raymond tried to answer as if he understood her, but all the time he was watching Simone, who was so seated that he could see her in a mirror hanging behind Madame de Maumussy. However the girl's face only expressed a little annoyance—nothing more serious. Meanwhile the duchess proceeded with her remarks. The baron had informed her, she told him, that the authorities had been very unjust to his young associate, although Raymond's reputation was already well established as one of the best graduates of the engineering school. "Now was this true?" she asked. Fortunately a diversion came at this moment, for Simone was not the only person who had not taken her eyes from Raymond and the duchess. The baron also had watched them closely, and he was surprised to see his young friend talk so long with a woman whom he knew he disliked. "Perhaps I had best go to his assistance," he said to himself. And leaving Madame de Maillefert to the mercy of her rapacious guests, the placehunters, he swiftly approached the younger duchess.

"Did you not tell me," she exclaimed, as soon as he was within hearing, "that this gentleman was too modest in making his worth known?"

"I did, indeed, madame."

"Well, then, it becomes our duty to do it for him."

The baron smiled. "I am not in odour of sanctity," he replied, "and my recommendation would be quite without value."

"But I can do a great deal," eagerly interrupted the duchess; and at once, in her Italian accent, she began to boast of her influence over her husband, who was all powerful, she said, and who had too often used his influence to find places for persons of inferior capacity to refuse to serve a man of real talent. She declared that the duke would do what she desired with the greatest possible willingness.

Raymond, whose thoughts may be easily imagined, made no reply, and the situation, despite the baron's presence, was becoming extremely awkward when the unappreciated pianist, ascertaining that the guests had danced sufficiently, closed the piano, and with an air of profound humiliation seated himself in his corner again. At the same time the lordlings from the neighbourhood took their leave. Madame de Maumussy saw that that the baron was waiting with polite impatience for Raymond, so she bid them both good night, but not without neglecting to say to the young engineer: "We will speak of this again. It will not be my fault if the future does not recompense you for the past."

Without knowing very well what he did or said, the young man pressed her hand. In the mirror he had just seen Simone approach her mother, say a few words and leave the room, but not without giving Madame de Maumussy one last, strange look. "I shall not see her again to-night," he

thought. "Why did she leave the room? I have been the victim of my own foolish vanity, and she does not care for me as I hoped she did."

Madame de Maillefert and her son, so haughty and indifferent generally, now approached the baron and his young friend, and did not let them depart until they had obtained a formal promise that they would dine at the château on the following day.

They started off, and as soon as they were alone, the baron asked Raymond—"Come, what is this charade they are playing in your honour?"

"Ah, I know no more than you, sir."

"You see, my dear boy," continued the old engineer, "you would be making a great mistake if you looked at their politeness as a proof of their regard and liking. Such people never take so much trouble without a motive. Have you any idea what it can be?"

"Not in the least."

The old engineer seemed to be thinking. He was piqued by Raymond's reserve. With that delicious lack of self-knowledge which even the wisest have, he exclaimed—"I never meddle with other people's affairs, nor do I wish to force your confidence; but I should not be true to the friendship I feel for you did I not say, 'Look out and be careful!'"

These exhortations were needless; for unused as Raymond was to drawing-room diplomacy, inexperienced as he might be in those miserable intrigues which are veiled by the politeness of good society, he understood that something strange was going on about him. An instinct, superior to all experience, warned him that he was threatened by some serious danger. But what could this danger be? Was it the Duchess de Maumussy whom he was to fear? If the vanity which lurks even in the most modest man's heart did not deceive him, the young duchess took more than a friendly interest in his welfare. Might it not happen that this interest had a different foundation to what he had imagined. Jean Cornevin's last letter returned to his mind. Had not Jean said Laurent Cornevin was in all probability living? And in that case the proof of Maumussy's and Combelaïne's crime still existed. Might not the assassins know this, and might they not be living in momentary expectation of being unmasked? If this were so, then Raymond asked himself if the Duchess de Maumussy had not possibly been sent to Maillefert with the sole purpose of deluding him by magnificent promises, and inducing him to abandon any intentions he might have formed of punishing the assassins?

"In that case," he thought, "Madame de Maillefert and her son are in the plot, and this would explain their advances."

But Mademoiselle Simone was not; for while she compelled Raymond to dance with their guest, she at the same time gave him a warning glance. "I must speak to her," he said to himself. "I must find the courage to ask her to enlighten me."

Unfortunately when he reached the château on the following evening, Simone was not in the reception room, where the guests usually assembled, pending the announcement of dinner, and, indeed Madame de Maillefert seemed very much vexed by the girl's absence. "She is insupportable," she declared, "with her mania for rushing about the country, as if she were a poor country gentleman, with all his business on his own shoulders."

Raymond was standing near the young Duchess de Maumussy, who instantly remarked—"It is strange, certainly; Mademoiselle de Maillefert has most eccentric habits for a girl of her rank and with such a fortune, too. For, do you know, it is said that she possesses eight millions, and that she will present this large sum to the man who is skilful enough to please

her." The allusion was direct, insulting, and evidently premeditated—and in fact as if the young duchess feared that she might not have been understood, she added—"A girl as rich as that ought to renounce all hope of being loved for herself!"

Twenty-four hours before, Raymond would have taken up the cudgels on Simone's behalf; but he was learning self-control and so he made no rejoinder. The dinner was not very gay, for only four or five of the Parisian guests, who had been invited to the château, now remained. The others had flown back to the capital with the first frost. And if the duchess still lingered in the country, it was, as she herself declared, on account of business matters. The evening passed without Simone appearing, although at eight o'clock she had sent Miss Dodge to inform her mother of her return.

"Is she vexed with me?" thought Raymond, as he entered the Rising Sun. "She evidently avoids me!"

The next day, however, when he called at the château with the baron he found no one but Simone in the room they were shown to. Did she expect him? This was certainly the baron's idea—for after a few words he approached the window and remained there, although it was quite dark. It is true, however, that by reason of the very darkness the polished panes of glass served almost as a mirror in reflecting the faces of the two young people. Raymond did his best to control his agitation, for was not this the occasion he had longed for? And he felt that he must snatch at it.

Hardly had he opened his lips, however, than Simone interrupted him. She was very pale, and the contraction of her trembling lips testified to her agitation. "Was it you, sir," she asked, "who, on the night of the ball, was shown into Miss Lydia's private sitting-room?"

"By one of your servants, mademoiselle."

"I know. My mother and I were in the next room engaged in a most painful discussion, and we undoubtedly spoke very loud."

Raymond turned pale. His indiscretion had been involuntary, and but for the baron he would have left the room at the first words that met his ear. He could not say this, of course, nor could he utter a falsehood.

"You spoke rather loud, certainly," he stammered.

"So that you heard all we said?" He did not answer. "Did you hear me?" insisted the young girl.

Never did the word yes cost Raymond so bitter a pang. Would she hate him for evermore? No. She looked at him steadily, but with no anger in her eyes. "And what did you infer from what you heard?" she asked.

"That your devotion is sublime."

"That is no answer," she said, impatiently.

Raymond was puzzled for a moment; but suddenly he exclaimed: "Do you mean that you wish for my advice?"

She leaned towards him with as much anxiety as if her future destiny depended on his words. "I do, indeed," she said.

He, too, had a strange feeling that his reply was of supreme importance both for himself and her; and so he carefully weighed his words. "Not only do I admire your course, mademoiselle, but I approve of it as the only one worthy of a Maillefert. Had I been asked by you I should have advised it. You consider yourself to be merely the custodian of the immense fortune bequeathed to you. You are right. This fortune belongs in a degree to the house of Maillefert, and you feel it ought to be expended to sustain the honour and glory of a great name."

The girl's eyes lighted up with joy and thankfulness. "Do you mean that all ought to be expended in that way?" she asked.

"Yes, every farthing."

"You really mean this?"

"I do, indeed, for on this I found my dearest hopes."

She stopped him with a gesture. "To deceive one now would be unworthy of a man who, hearing a young girl insulted, risked his life to defend her—and—I believe you——" As she spoke she held out her hand to Raymond, who clasped it in both his own. "Believe in me, too," she added, "only——"

She did not finish. All the blood in her heart flew to her face. Raymond turned and perceived the Duchess de Maumussy standing on the threshold. Had she heard anything? and had she purposely selected for her appearance the very moment which instinct told her was most fraught with danger for herself and her influence? She certainly seemed greatly disturbed. Her very lips were white. "Where is your mother?" she asked Simone.

The young girl hesitated. In fact she was afraid to trust her voice to speak. However, the baron came to her assistance. He bowed in the most deferential way, and replied. "The duchess and her son, so we were informed by the servant who admitted us, are engaged with two of the sub-prefects of the department."

This was true, as perhaps Madame de Maumussy was already aware. However, she laughed unnaturally and then dropped on to a chair. "How droll it is," she exclaimed, "to see this dear dear duchess and this excellent duke busying themselves with politics." Then, all at once, with the feverish volubility of people who are afraid of silence, she began to talk of the events now occurring in Paris. She could speak with authority on the matter, she said, for she had that morning received a letter from her husband. The duke had written that he was not satisfied with the way things were going. In his opinion the imperial government was getting into trouble. The emperor closed his ears to the advice of his old friends, and listened to charlatans and clap trap politicians. The influence of the empress had brought men who were unfitted for power into office.

"I was mistaken," thought Raymond, as he heard her talk in this fashion. "This woman was not sent here by my enemies. If she knew who I was, she would never speak like that."

Whatever the cause may have been, it was nevertheless certain that something had roused the Duchess de Maumussy from her habitual apathy and nonchalance. All her being vibrated, colour rose to her cheeks, and she panted for breath as she spoke of her husband and his friends, of the men in office, and the intrigues of the hour—her stinging criticism dealing in turn with the emperor, the empress and the court. "She knows everything," thought the baron; but at the same time he shrewdly suspected that Madame de Maumussy was merely talking to hide the real cause of her anger.

The proof of this was, that when her hostess entered the room with her son, the young duchess received them with almost insulting jests, respecting the long conference they had had with their political friends. Raymond and the baron were also able to measure the important position which the young duchess must occupy by the self-control of Madame de Maillefert who but gently replied: "My dear Clélie, you certainly have an attack of the nerves to-night."

"You are mistaken," answered Madame de Maumussy, with an unnatural laugh; "I was never in better health or spirits."

When our friends left the château an hour later, the baron was more puzzled than ever. "Well!" he asked, "what do you make out of all this?"

Raymond, who was in the seventh heaven, promptly replied: "This has been the happiest day of my life."

"The deuce it has!"

"Yes, I worship Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and from what occurred to-night I believe that she is not indifferent to me. Did you hear what she said to me?"

"Perfectly, and if French is French, and if I am not an old fool, she plainly asked you if you would be willing to marry her without a dowry."

Raymond's face was radiant. "That was just what I thought she meant me to understand."

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "And what then?" he asked.

Raymond looked puzzled. "In my opinion," he said, "Mademoiselle Simone's dowry is the only obstacle between us. If the dowry is suppressed, the obstacle ceases to exist."

"So you believe that matters will go smoothly now?"

Like all impressionable natures, Raymond could pass in one moment from the greatest enthusiasm to the most profound depression. "Mademoiselle Simone," he answered, in a troubled voice, "told me to believe in her, and I shall obey her blindly."

After this stormy evening, after Madame de Maumussy's strange behaviour, after involuntarily witnessing her semi-quarrel with the Duchess de Maillefert, Raymond was not without some anxiety as to the reception awaiting him on his next visit at the château. His anxiety was superfluous, however, for he was even better received than before. Indeed in less than a week he was made to feel as much at home at the château as if it had belonged to his own family. A future son-in-law could not have been treated with more delicate consideration, or with more charming attentions. The duchess no longer called him Monsieur Delorge, but Monsieur Raymond, and sometimes merely Raymond.

"She had better come out with it and call him 'my dear son-in-law,' " thought the baron.

Philippe's familiarity was even more remarkable than his mother's, and all the more significant as it was displayed abroad. Every day, after breakfast, he went to join the engineers at their work along the river, spending hours in watching their operations with every sign of eager interest. He walked with Raymond through Rosiers arm-in-arm. He drove him to Saumur and to Angers. He dropped in at the Rising Sun and shared his dinner, saying that the cooking was better than at Maillefert, and at last he even dragged the young engineer to the best café in the place for a game of billiards. Madame de Maillefert, on her side, was never so cordial as when she had strangers in her drawing-room. She then took occasion to show her intimacy with Raymond, and called him by his christian name. It was also clear that the duchess and her son purposely left him with Simone—for whenever they walked in the grounds Madame de Maillefert would invariably say: "Give your arm to Simone, my dear Raymond." She herself took the baron's, while Philippe offered his to the young duchess.

And regularly, too, did Raymond find himself alone with Simone. The poor fellow was almost frightened. He could not credit the fact that his path was so smoothened for him—he dared not believe that no obstacles would arise.

"You think it too good to last?" said the old engineer.

"I cannot comprehend it—that is what I mean," answered Raymond.

"I have not yet made up my mind what to believe," said the baron. "What I suspect is a different matter." But he would not explain himself further, saying that if he were correct, facts would soon speak for themselves.

However, the more expansive the duchess became, the more reserve did Simone show. The more ingeniously her mother arranged *tele-d-tele* meetings with Raymond, the more carefully she avoided them. She was rarely out of the shadow of her governess's skirts, and Miss Lydia now took part in all their conversations. "She hates me!" thought Raymond, in profound despair. "What can I have done?"

He thought she grew colder, paler, and stiffer each day. She rode about all day long, was rarely indoors, and was as busy with the people under her orders as any gentleman farmer. "Poor child!" said the baron; "they will end by killing her."

Her eyes were often red, as though she had been weeping, and at times Raymond felt he could bear it no longer—that he must speak to her. One day, finding her in tears, he exclaimed, regardless of the presence of the governess, "Either banish me from your presence, or allow me to share your grief." She did not answer, whereupon Raymond urged her to speak. "Who is troubling you?" he asked so fiercely that the governess started. "Do you think while I live," he continued, "that any one that breathes shall make you unhappy?"

But with gentle sweetness she interrupted him: "Do you wish to drive me to despair?" she murmured. "Do you wish to ruin us?"

"Us!" she said, "us!" Raymond heard it. "Can I do *nothing*?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"But this anxiety is killing me!"

"Do you think," she said, with her eyes fixed on his, "that I do not suffer also." But to all his ardent entreaties for an explanation, she would only reply: "I cannot—I have no right to utter a word."

Poor Miss Dodge looked on in wonder at this strange scene.

"You are pitiless, mademoiselle," stammered Raymond. "It would be even less cruel to banish me from your presence."

Simone checked him. "You are robbing me of all my courage," she said, "at the very moment when I need it most." And then, as if she were afraid of betraying herself, she took the arm of her governess and hurried from the room, leaving Raymond crushed by a sense of his own powerlessness.

He pictured Simone's situation, in which horror was increased by mystery; and he realized that she stood alone, without friends or advice. Hearing a noise, he suddenly raised his eyes. The Duchess de Maumassy had entered the room, and stood looking at him. He shivered, for, to his mind, her glance was full of cutting irony. This was the first time she had spoken to him since the evening she had behaved so strangely. "What is the matter?" she softly said.

Without pausing to reflect, Raymond walked towards her. "The matter is this," he said, "that I love Mademoiselle Simone more than life itself—more than all the world—that is, I cannot possibly bear to see her so wretched, and I am fully determined to discover who it is who is killing her by inches."

She did not flinch under his gaze. Not one of her eyelashes quivered. "Do you intend that for me?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

The young duchess hesitated; but finally walking towards the door of the room, which had remained partially open, she securely closed it, and then returned to Raymond. "Have you sense enough left, Monsieur Delorge, to understand what I say?"

"I am perfectly calm, madame."

"Then listen to the advice of a friend. Leave Maillefert, not in an hour, but this very moment."

Raymond laughed. "Do I trouble you so much," he asked.

She looked at him haughtily.

"You!—trouble me!" she rejoined. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she continued more gently: "You think the young lady of the house loves you. Perhaps she thinks so herself. But you are both mistaken. True passion neither reflects nor reasons; but Simone has a calculating mind. If she really loved you she would say one word—only one word—and might be your wife. She will not say it!"

Raymond laughed again. "I am at a loss," he said, "to understand the motive which prompts you to tell me this."

The young duchess's eyes flashed fire, but she controlled her voice, and answered, in an under tone: "If you happened to be in a house which was about to fall, and a passer-by called out to you to take care, would you stop to analyze his motives. I am that passer-by. Your heart is too good, and you have too great a contempt for money to condescend to artifices and intriguing. You have no suspicion what persons who thirst for luxury and amusement may be induced to do. Don't acquire the knowledge at your own expense. Your place is not here. The more warmly you are received the more fear you ought to feel. Believe me, it is not mere life you risk."

If there was real commiseration in this woman's tone of voice, Raymond at all events did not perceive it. He imagined that she wished to insult him. And catching hold of her arm, "Speak!" he cried. "You have said too much—not to say more——"

But she disengaged herself, and, with a contemptuous glance, rejoined: "I think you are perfectly mad!" Thereupon she approached the piano and began to play in a loud key.

The more Raymond pondered over the mysterious words he had just heard the more gloomy his apprehensions became. Was Madame de Maumussy sincere in her wish to warn him, or was she acting a part? However, in either case was it not best for him to try and wring the truth from her? "Madame," he began.

But she did not seem to hear him; her fingers were darting over the keys with marvellous agility. Perhaps she really did not hear. Thinking this he went towards her, and gently touched her shoulder. "Well!" she asked, half turning to him.

"Have pity on me," he resumed.

"I shall tell you no more—it is useless to urge me." Then, as she saw that Raymond determined to persist, she added: "Very well, I abandon the field!" And she left the room humming an air from the opera she had been playing.

Raymond hesitated. Fortunately a ray of sense was left him, and he determined to go off at once. In the vestibule he met the Duchess de

Maillefert, who was taking leave of an old lady who had been paying her a visit. As soon as she saw Raymond she exclaimed: "You are not going yet, surely!"

He did not answer her, however, but rushed down the steps and thence along the avenue. It seemed to him that he was treading upon a board stretched over an abyss—a board that was bending and cracking beneath him. And meanwhile a voice sounded in his ears—the voice of conscience—declaring that he deserved his fate—he, the son of General Delorge—for mingling with the folks who were the friends of his father's murderers. On reaching his room at the inn he spent hours in alternate fits of despair and rage, when suddenly the door opened and the baron appeared. "I have just come from Maillefert," he said, "and I left everyone in great surprise at your sudden disappearance. I am not curious——"

Raymond turned towards him. "You shall know everything, sir," he said.

And then, with the most punctilious exactitude, he related his interviews with Simone and the young duchess.

The baron listened, and when Raymond had finished, "Fire and fury," he exclaimed. "Nervous, excitable people like yourself ought to stay at home."

"That is a very easy thing to say, sir. But what would you have done in my place?"

"I should have taken good care not to offend Madame de Maumussy."

"That woman is my enemy, sir."

"I dare say. But the duchess is an Italian—that is to say, a woman who yields to impressions of the moment—who, instead of analyzing her emotions, allows herself to be carried away by them. Take my advice. Go back to the château, as if nothing had happened."

And, to all appearance, nothing had; for when Raymond appeared at Maillefert, the next day, all was calm as usual. "Have you seen Philippe?" asked the duchess.

"No, madame."

"He has gone to the station to meet our friends, who are coming by the nine o'clock express."

"You expect guests, then?"

"Yes," she said, "we are expecting my dear Clélie's husband, the Duke de Maumussy, who will bring with him the famous architect, Monsieur Verdale, and the Count de Combelaïne as well."

At any other time Raymond would have been crushed by the mere mention of these names. But human nature like steel plunged red-hot into an icy torrent, sometimes acquires superior qualities of resistance and elasticity and is at times endowed, by suffering, with marvellous energy. Thus Raymond turned pale, but his voice was steady as he replied: "You expect them to-night, then?"

Madame de Maillefert looked at the clock. "They will be here in less than an hour," she replied. And she immediately began a most enthusiastic panegyric of the Duke de Maumussy, whose chivalric character and extraordinary political abilities she professed to admire very much. Combelaïne also had her respect as a devoted servant of the empire—an heroic soldier, ready to pour out his blood for his country; in fact he reminded her, she said, of one of those loyal cavaliers who in knightly times asked, in dying, to be buried at the feet of the sovereign they had served.

Sufficiently master of himself not to go off again in a fury, Raymond

approached the sofa where Simone sat near a little work-table. Still he did not get rid of the duchess, who with a great display of animation went on to describe the merits of the great architect Verdale, the self-made man who by reason of his talents, had reached the highest rank in his profession, and made an immense fortune. She was thinking of making some changes at Maillefert, and M. Verdale would give her some ideas.

On hearing this Simone looked up in such evident surprise that her mother was quite disgusted. "Yes indeed," she continued, in a determined tone; "Yes; these old barracks must be made more habitable. I have reasons for thinking that the year 1870 will not elapse without her Majesty the Empress doing our house the honour of spending a day or two in it."

But Raymond did not hear her. He was watching the clock and calculating how many minutes longer he could venture to remain at the château.

"Do you know, dear Clélie," asked the duchess, "how many days your husband proposes to give us?"

"No; he has not told me," replied Madame de Maumussy looking up from a paper she was pretending to read.

Raymond must go in ten minutes. He glanced around the room, which to him was sanctified by so many hours of hope. He looked at Simone, who was industriously engaged, not with some useless delicate work, but in sewing some baby linen, which she had promised to a poor girl. At last the clock struck nine, and Raymond rose.

"Do not go yet," cried the duchess; "wait and see our friends."

"Impossible, madame; the baron is expecting me."

"In that case," replied Madame de Maillefert with a charming smile, "I will not detain you. But come to-morrow."

He bowed without a word; faintly pressed the hand which Simone extended to him, and then departed. The night was dark and cold; the sky black with clouds, and a furious wind was tearing through the trees. Raymond gave full vent to his rage as soon as he was out of doors. But as he reached the suspension bridge he paused—a carriage was rapidly approaching, and inside, by the light of the lamps, he could distinguish four men—M. Philippe and his friends.

III.

It was nearly midnight when Raymond entered the Rising Sun, where Master Béru sat in the kitchen making up his accounts. On seeing the young fellow he exclaimed; "Please go to the baron at once, sir; he is very impatient to see you."

Raymond found the baron walking up and down the large sitting-room. "At last!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "You can't retreat now! You are in for it!"

"What is the matter?"

"Something serious. Your dear Duchess de Maillefert deserves—well, never mind. Sit down; we must talk together."

But as he was a prudent man, he began by assuring himself that all the doors were carefully closed, and that no one was listening, after which he returned to his companion. "You know," said he, solemnly, "that it is a rule of mine never to meddle with other people's business."

Raymond had many a time smiled at his superior's self-delusion in this

respect, but he was not in the mood to do so now. So he waited for more to come.

"For your sake," continued the baron, "I shall do violence to the principles of my whole life. We have now lived together for months. I have realized that you are generous, loyal, and sincere—too sincere in fact. And so I have become—what shall I say—accustomed—no interested—yes, interested in you as if you were my son."

All these preliminaries on the baron's part ought to have startled Raymond, but he simply replied: "I will listen to you, sir, as if you were my own father."

The baron walked up and down the room for a moment and then suddenly stopped short. "This a matter in which your honour is involved," he said.

"My honour!" exclaimed Raymond.

"Yes; there is not a minute to lose. No time for hesitation or temporizing. To-morrow you must go to Maillefert, and formally ask the Duchess de Maillefert to give you the hand of her daughter, Mademoiselle Simone."

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Raymond.

"I mean what I say—it must be done," answered the baron. "It is absolutely the only way by which you can retain one ray of reputation and escape from the shameful snare which has been laid for your too confiding feet."

Raymond passed his hand over his brow. "I hear you, sir," he said, "but I do not understand you."

"And to think," continued the baron, sadly, "that it was I who encouraged you to love Mademoiselle Simone. Fool that I was! It is to-day reported throughout the district, at Saumur and even at Angers, that Simone de Maillefert is your mistress."

Raymond started to his feet. "This is the result of that Bizet de Chenet's cowardly slander," he cried in a hoarse voice.

But the baron stopped him. "Bizet is a fool," said he, "and his words have no weight. If Simone has lost her reputation it is through her own mother. I mean what I say. The duchess has openly declared not to one person, but to several that she hoped to induce you to marry her daughter—although you had seduced her, and were now tired of her."

A frightful cry of rage burst from Raymond's lips. "Never!" he exclaimed, "No mother ever said such a thing."

"She did say it—I know she did!"

"Very well, then. In that case I shall not defer going to the château until to-morrow; I shall go there to-night. I will tear this miserable woman's tongue out, and nail it to the door."

This explosion of despair was anticipated by the baron, who caught hold of his young companion's hand. "Before you do anything," he said, "you must listen to me. Listen and decide for yourself. It is more than a month, is it not, since Madame de Maillefert made such extraordinary advances to us that our suspicions were awakened? Did I not say to you at the time that my suspicions were of an odious character?"

"Yes, you did."

"Very well. From that hour all my powers of perception have been on the alert. Not a day has passed without my trying to solve this mystery, and that is why you have seen me hovering around Madame de Maumussy, for I thought she knew the truth."

"And she did, of course?"

"No; she was ignorant of it until three days ago, I am sure of that."

When she learned it I can't precisely tell. She may have been her hostess's unconscious accomplice. At all events, as soon as she knew it she advised you to fly."

"Proceed," said Raymond.

"As I could discover nothing from her," continued the baron, "I looked elsewhere. My foolish title and my family connections opened the doors of several houses in the neighbourhood to me. I made everybody talk about the Mailleferts, hoping to glean an item of intelligence here and there, and which, added together, might prove important."

"Ah," murmured Raymond, "how shall I ever repay you?"

"By allowing me to be your guide, my dear boy. But wait—I lost all my trouble until this very evening, when I called at the house of Madame de Lachère, that lady, you remember, whose husband wants to be made a prefect—'Your young colleague is behaving disgracefully,' she said to me, in a severe tone. Feeling that I was on the track, I fortunately contented myself with an inane smile. 'How so?' I asked, 'Oh! you need not be so cautious with me,' she replied, 'for I know everything.' I bowed. 'In that case, madame, you are wiser than I,' I said, whereupon she laughed. 'My dear baron,' she continued, 'it was the duchess herself, who, in an agony of grief, confided her daughter's situation to me, and told me of the efforts she was making to induce the man who had seduced her to marry her, late in the day as it was.'"

"The woman lied!" cried Raymond.

The baron shook his head. "So I thought myself at first, and indeed I allowed her to see that I doubted her." But she declared that she was not the only person to whom Madame de Maillefert had made this most incredible revelation, and to prove it to me she called one of her friends, who she said knew the same thing from the same source. As I still seemed to doubt, she then summoned her husband, who assured me that he had heard from the son the same story that his wife had heard from the mother."

"What! from the duke?" cried Raymond. "Simone's brother? But why," he exclaimed—"why this abominable slander?"

"Why? Because the duchess and her noble son have nothing but Simone's income to live upon. If she marries they are lost. They intend that she shan't marry—and this is why I want you to go to-morrow and ask for Mademoiselle Simone's hand."

Raymond hesitated. "I am at this moment in a most horrible state of perplexity," he stammered. "I am not free to do as I should like."

The baron looked aghast. "Can you hesitate?" he cried.

"Ah! if you knew the truth," exclaimed Raymond; and this time, carried away by the situation, he confided his whole story—the story of his father's murder, and his mother's hopes of vengeance—to his old friend.

"I understand," said the baron, when the young man had finished speaking. "I now see the reason of all your strange hesitation. But you must not waver. There is no reason in the world strong enough to let a pure young girl remain for a moment under such an infamous accusation."

"You are right. I will do exactly as you advise," said Raymond, and they parted for the night.

Day was beginning to break, gray and sad, when Raymond awoke after an hour's heavy sleep. He felt utterly exhausted, but his head was clear and ready for any emergency. It was Wednesday, December 1st, 1869; that is to say, seventeen years previously, to a day, General Delorge had fallen the victim of cowardly assassins. And he, Raymond Delorge—he

who, on the lid of his father's coffin, had sworn eternal vengeance on his murderers, was on his way to meet them. But imperious, inexorable necessity required it—he must, before aught else, protect poor Simone.

And so, dressed in the traditional costume customary on such occasions, he started forth at noon precisely. “I shall go with you,” said the baron, “but let us understand each other. I shall remain in the reception-room, and you must see the Duchess de Maillefert alone—my presence might make her angry—and you must force an explanation from her.”

As they walked along, Raymond asked, “How do you think the duchess will receive me?”

“Who knows! Perhaps as a saviour. Possibly as a lackey.”

“And the others?”

“What others? Oh, you mean those men! Let them rest for the time being. Besides, what do you care for such scoundrels. Hold your head high, young friend. It is for them to bow before you.”

All the valets were in their places in the spacious vestibule. “They look more like creditors than lackeys,” said the old baron; “and I should infinitely prefer to wait on myself than to be waited on by them.”

The servants usually rose when Raymond or the chief appeared, but on this occasion only one of them shuffled to his feet. “Is the Duchess de Maillefert at home?” asked the baron.

“She is out,” answered the valet, in the assured tone of a servant who has received his orders.

“Did she say when she would be in?”

“My mistress never gives any such instructions.”

Raymond and the baron exchanged glances. “We will wait, then,” said the old gentleman.

The footman answered in a most offensive tone: “I told you, gentlemen, that Madame la Duchesse was out, that no one knew when she would come in—or if she would ever come at all!”

The baron's face flushed. He asked Raymond for a card. “Take this,” he said to the servant—“take this instantly to Madame de Maillefert; or, if she is really out, give it to her on her return. Monsieur Delorge wishes to see her as soon as possible. Now show us to the drawing-room.”

His tone was so imperious, that the valet obeyed him, grumbling, “Well! I can't help it. She must say what she chooses.”

As soon as they were alone in the reception-room, Raymond exclaimed: “Well, this is a good beginning!” But, before the baron could reply, the door opened again, and the same footman re-appeared. “Madame la Duchesse will receive the gentlemen,” he said.

“Go,” said the baron; “I will wait here.”

It was in a sort of boudoir, between her dressing-room and sleeping apartment, that the Duchess de Maillefert received young Delorge. She had been dressing when the card was taken to her. Exceedingly angry, she sent away her maid, and contented herself with twisting her hair into a knot and assuming a pink dressing-gown trimmed with lace, which had once been magnificent, but was now faded and tumbled. Nothing could have been less attractive, less gracious, or less noble in appearance, than this woman disturbed in the great work of her existence. Without the artifices of the toilette-table she appeared such as she really was; such as she had become—thanks to increasing age, and thanks, still more, to powder and rouge, cosmetics and lotions. In fact, *fêtes*, excitement, the keen pursuit of money, financial anxieties, all the troubles of her stormy life, had greatly

impaired her once remarkable beauty. She was seated in a large arm-chair, with her feet on a cushion, when Raymond entered. She looked at him from head to foot as he approached her. "You are alone?" she said, in a sharp voice.

"The Baron de Boursonne is waiting for me down stairs."

"That is a great pity! I should have liked to compliment him on his charming ways."

"Madame!"

"Is he not your adviser?"

"He is my devoted friend."

"Ah! indeed! And it he then who teaches you to insist on seeing people contrary to the orders they give their servants?"

"It was necessary for me to speak to you."

"You could not wait a day, of course?"

"No, madame."

The lady shrugged her shoulders disdainfully, and settled herself in her chair. "Very well; then, now that you are here, say what you have to say!"

Far from disconcerting Raymond, this insulting reception only increased his coolness. "Madame," he began, "I belong to an honourable family. My father, whom I had the misfortune to lose when I was very young, was a general in the French army; my mother springs from the De Lespéran family, which is of good and old nobility. I am not yet thirty; I am a civil engineer; and I ask the honour of your daughter's hand."

It was with the bewildered air of a woman contemplating an absolute phenomenon that the duchess examined the young man.

"And it was to say this," she asked, "that you insisted on seeing me to-day?"

"For that only, madame——"

Raymond's coolness seemed to annoy her.

"Do you know who we are?" she exclaimed.

"I know, madame, that your daughter belongs to an illustrious family, that she is the descendant of a long line of loyal and valiant gentlemen, who have bequeathed from father to son a spotless name and pure traditions of honour and duty."

The duchess coloured, and eager to punish what she felt to be an insult, she asked: "Do you know what my daughter's fortune is?"

"Not positively, madame."

"But you have some idea, I presume. Let me tell you that her capital is about seven millions of francs. Rather a tempting amount, I think."

Insulting as was this speech, Raymond heard it, to all appearance, unmoved. "I await your reply," he coldly said.

"My reply!" she cried angrily. "Do you imagine, sir, that I attach any importance to such a preposterous request? Can you have really hoped anything from me?"

"I hoped nothing, madame." She started, and Raymond proceeded: "I had a duty to fulfil; I have accomplished it. I shall never speak to you again on this subject. I wished to give public evidence of my respectful admiration for Mademoiselle de Maillefort. I have done so. I have also openly expressed my intention of taking this step, and I shall as openly publish your reply."

He bowed, and turned to the door, but Madame de Maillefort stopped him. "What do you mean?" she asked, in a very different tone.

"What I say, nothing else."

"Simone has been talking to you. Simone sent you to me."

"No, madame, I swear to you that she has not."

"She loves you, however; you know she does."

For these words Raymond was almost willing to forgive the duchess. "God grant that you are speaking the truth, madame," he replied, in a trembling voice.

The duchess, who was pale and frowning, seemed greatly troubled, but all at once a sudden inspiration lighted up her face. "Wait a moment," she said. "It is Simone who shall answer you herself."

She rang, and as soon as her maid appeared, she exclaimed, "Find Mademoiselle Simone, and bid her come to me instantly."

What strange idea had now entered this unworthy mother's head? Troubled beyond expression, Raymond felt that he should not be able to contain himself were Simone to appear, and yet he knew that he should more than ever require all his self-control.

IV.

"You love Simone?" asked the duchess abruptly.

"Madame——"

"My dear sir, your fate is in her hands. One word from her and I yield. It is for you to obtain that word from her." She checked herself and listened.

"There she comes!" she added.

Nor was the duchess mistaken, for Simone now appeared at the door of the boudoir. "Good heavens!" she cried, when her eyes lighted on Raymond, whose presence in the château she was ignorant of.

"Come in, Simone," said her mother, and the girl complied, looking from the duchess to Raymond with earnest inquiry in her beautiful eyes.

"My dear Simone," began Madame de Maillefert, "a most important event has just taken place. This gentleman has asked me for your hand."

The poor child's face flushed scarlet. "Mamma!" she cried, with a faint hope of recalling her mother to her senses.

But nothing ever checked the duchess when she had an aim in view. "I know by experience what a hell a home without love is, and so I desire, my daughter, that you should obey the dictates of your own heart. What shall I say to Monsieur Raymond Delorge?"

Confused, humiliated, and shocked, the girl dropped her head. "Have pity, mamma! Let us talk when we are alone."

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "There it is!" she cried. "You always pass as a virgin martyr, and I am the victim, as usual. I wish that our conversation should have a witness, and I am very pleased that this gentleman is here."

Tears started to the girl's eyes. "Is it possible, mamma," she murmured, "that you are willing to admit a stranger to the knowledge of the sad disagreements in our family?"

"Oh! do you consider Monsieur Delorge a stranger?"

Raymond had just decided that the best course he could adopt was to depart, and these words decided him. "I will retire," he said. "Heaven forbid that my presence should ever be an annoyance to you."

But the duchess started from her chair and placed herself against the

door. "Stay!" she exclaimed, in an imperative tone. "Simone must explain herself once for all, this very moment." Then turning to her daughter, she coldly added: "Speak."

Anger had dried Simone's tears. "You wish me to speak," she said. "Very well." And she averted her face to avoid Raymond's eyes. "I consent," she added "to become this gentleman's wife, but only on the conditions which I stated to you before."

Only one reflection deterred Raymond from throwing himself at the feet of the trembling girl. Plainly enough the question of his marriage with her had been already discussed between mother and daughter.

"That is to say, on the condition that the ruin of our house shall be completed for this gentleman's benefit," sneered the duchess.

"Mamma, how can you say such a thing?"

"I only say what is true."

"How can you accuse me of ruining our house, when I have done all in my power to sustain it, and am ready to sacrifice everything?"

"Yes, everything except what I ask you. I ask nothing for myself, Heaven knows. I am an old woman, and only require a few thousand louis to pay my entrance fee at a convent. But your brother——"

"I cannot——"

"Your brother is the head of our house——the heir of our name. Philippe is Duke de Maillefert, and you owe him respect and submission."

"Mamma, it is useless to insist."

Then the old discussion about money—the same kind of thing that Raymond had overheard on the night of the ball—began again; but, under these circumstances, how infinitely more degrading!

"Take care, Simone!" said the duchess at last, her voice trembling with anger. "Take care! You will compel me to give Monsieur Delorge a refusal." And turning to Raymond, she exclaimed, fiercely, "You hear her! You pretend to love her, and yet you have nothing to say!"

"I have faith in Mademoiselle Simone," he replied, using the words the girl had used to him. "Her decisions are sacred to me."

The duchess laughed aloud. "In other words," she said, "you love my daughter, but you love her money more. I expected this. I knew very well how much faith to put in your wonderful disinterestedness."

Simone raised her head, and when she saw Raymond turn pale under this insult she could no longer keep silent. "You may insult me, mamma, as much as you please; I am accustomed to it. But you must not accuse Monsieur Delorge of cupidity. It is more than I can bear. I know his feelings on the point. He thinks, as I do, that I ought to sustain the family dignity with all that I possess."

The duchess laughed her hateful laugh once more. "And this is why you refuse to give half of your fortune to your brother?"

"I do more than that now."

"How is that?"

"I give him—or rather you—my entire income."

"But keep your capital, and hold us at your mercy. If you should chance to change your mind some day, the Duke de Maillefert would be without bread."

"I never shall change my mind."

"Who knows? Let us suppose you married, and became the mother of a family. You would then begin to think that your money belonged more to your husband and your children than to your mother and your brother."

Mademoiselle Simone stamped her foot nervously, apparently forgetful of the presence of Raymond, who stood leaning on the back of a chair, listening. "I have told you, mamma," she said, "that I was willing to sign a paper which would ensure you and my brother the entire use of my income."

"Your income! Do you imagine that your brother could ever marry on such conditions? What family would receive him?"

"If my brother wishes to marry I will promise to settle half my property on his children."

The duchess curled her lips. "What a legal tone you adopt!" she said.

Meanwhile Raymond's admiration increased for Simone, while his contempt for her mother passed all bounds.

"What a head you have?" cried the duchess. "A will of iron—you are precisely like your father. Nothing moved him, nothing touched him—he would never bend."

"It is you, mamma, whose obstinacy passes all belief," said Simone, quietly.

The duchess turned quickly upon her daughter. "Enough! Once more, Simone, and for the last time, will you divide with your brother?"

"The capital? No, I cannot."

"Take care. Repeat this, and it is the immediate, irrevocable rupture of a marriage which you have at heart——"

"Ah! you are pitiless!" interrupted Simone. "You know very well that I am forbidden to do what you ask."

"Forbidden?"

"You know that I am bound by a solemn oath, sworn before God, on the hand of a dying man——"

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "You always say the same thing!"

"Yes, mamma, and I always shall." As the girl spoke her beauty was sublime. "Do you forget my father's death?" she cried. "It was five years ago, to be sure, and many events have taken place since then, but I remember—yes, I remember——"

"Simone!" said her mother, fiercely. "Simone!"

But the girl continued. "I was not sixteen. I was still at school. It was a winter's morning, and I was still asleep. I was awakened by one of the under teachers: 'Make haste!' she said. 'Dress quickly. A carriage is at the door. An accident has happened to your father. He is dying.'"

"It was true; my father was returning from Nice, and on alighting from the train while it was yet in motion, on arriving in Paris, he was thrown down and crushed by the wheels. When I reached home the servants were wild. You, my mother, were at a ball, no one knew where. My brother had been away for twenty-four hours. My father was lying on a mattress on the floor of the drawing-room. Poor papa! He was in agony, and it was a wonder that he still lived and was conscious. 'Here she is!' he murmured, when I appeared. And all at once he gathered his strength together. 'Listen to me quietly,' he said. 'There is no time to lose. Understand me. I have made no will. With the exception of your share, my fortune will to-morrow be at the disposal of your mother and your brother. How long will it last? And when it is gone, what will they do? To what depths will they drag this glorious name of Maillefert, which is found on every page of the history of France—the name which my ancestors bequeathed to me without spot or blemish.'"

Madame de Maillefert tried desperately to prevent Simone from continuing

her narrative. "You forgot that we are not alone," she said with a threatening frown.

"You were the first to forget it, madame," answered the young girl, coldly, and addressing Raymond, she continued: "I knelt at my father's side. He said to me: 'Simone, you are only fifteen, but it is on you that I depend to uphold this house. Fortunately, on your side, you will be enormously rich, and this means salvation. As soon as your mother and brother have devoured their fortune, they will want yours. Refuse! Give them your income to the last louis. It is your duty to do so; but never, under any pretext, yield your capital. You will be tortured, harassed, circumvented, martyred. Stand firm, or I shall rise from my tomb to curse you! I urge this for your own sake and for the sake of our name. Protect your mother and brother from themselves. It may be that you will marry some day, but the man you marry must understand that your fortune is only a sacred trust.' His voice grew faint, but at a sign he made, I laid a crucifix on his breast. 'Swear to me on this to obey my last wishes, and I shall die happy!' he gasped. I swore. You came in that moment, my mother, arrayed in your laces and jewels, and you heard the last words uttered by my father. 'You swear it, Simone,' he said. 'All the income, if you choose, but only the income. The capital is the ransom of the Maillefert honour.'"

Unable to restrain her daughter, the duchess sank into her chair choking with rage. "This, then, is the motive of your conduct?" she exclaimed as soon as Simone paused.

"Yes."

"The mere ravings of a dying man."

So terrible were the girl's eyes that her mother shrank from them. "The dying man was my father," said Simone, "and the approach of death, far from bedimming his noble intellect, only made the future clearer to him."

Raymond still stood listening and praying to heaven to grant him an inspiration. "So prayers, remonstrances, and commands are useless?" resumed Madame de Maillefert.

"Perfectly so."

"You hope that your hypocritical obstinacy will triumph over my legitimate determination?"

"I hope nothing, madame."

The duchess did not seem to realize how ignoble and debasing this conversation was carried on in Raymond's presence. "Then it is settled?" she added in the same hoarse voice.

"Yes."

Madame de Maillefert turned to Raymond. "This," said she, "is the timid, submissive virgin whom you wish for a wife! How does she strike you now? Answer, sir, if you please."

Raymond choked down his indignation. "It is in vain," he said, "that I try to find terms to express the admiration I feel for the heroic devotion and noble courage shown by Mademoiselle de Maillefert."

The duchess had staked all her hopes on one single chance—and she had lost. Like the foolish player who tears up his cards and tramples on them when he has lost, she now quite ceased to curb her tongue. "Very well," she said. "Since that is your opinion I will detain you no longer, and I beg that in future you will not trouble me with your society."

Raymond bowed and was about to leave, when Simone raised her slender hand. "Stay!" she said; and turning to her mother she added: "I have not finished. You desired that the explanation should be full and complete"

The duchess replied by extending her arm to the bell-rope. "Take care!" said her daughter, in an excited tone. "If you ring, some one will come; and I swear to you that I will say all I have to say in presence of your servants, your guests, and my brother—in fact before all the people whom, without my consent, you bring into my house; for I alone have the right to give orders here, to receive whom I choose, and dismiss those whom I please." The duchess's arm fell to her side. Was this her submissive daughter who had now turned upon her? To what or to whom was she indebted for this new energy? "I shall speak," continued Simone, with strange vehemence, "because I owe certain duties to myself, and I wish it to be known how I have fulfilled my father's dying wishes. You and my brother have only too well justified his gloomy apprehensions. Three years had not elapsed before the enormous fortune my father left you was scattered to the four winds of heaven. In what mysterious gulf you buried it I cannot tell. You have not—for you could not—have spent it. There are reigning princes with a court and an army, who possess less means than you had. And yet when I spend twenty-four hours in your house in Paris, I cannot find among your fifty valets a servant to carry a letter—and your maids make me ashamed or afraid. One morning your cook came to me, saying that he could not give me any breakfast unless I gave him some money—that he had lent you eighteen thousand francs, and that none of the shops in the neighbourhood would give you any further credit."

"This is too much!" said the duchess, "too much!"

But undismayed the young girl still went on—"My father said that Philippe and you were mad. Millionaires as you were, you never seemed to have any money. You were always in debt and you borrowed at sixty per cent. when your creditors pressed you. To gratify a whim, you mortgaged your property. To pay a gambling debt you sold the best meadows in Anjou, far below their value. In one single night, Philippe lost one hundred and sixty thousand francs at *baccarat*; on another occasion, his losses exceeded ten thousand louis; and at the same time such were your personal difficulties that you sent your diamonds to the Mont de Piété. You have brought ridicule and shame on our heads—"

"Silence!" cried her mother. "You are mad!"

"I hear of you through the newspapers," continued Simone. "I never read them, but the people about here take a malicious pleasure in congratulating me on what they call your brilliant successes; and so through them and in this way I have heard a very great deal. I have heard my brother, the Duke de Maillefert, spoken of as a jockey, a vain and uncultivated fop, a gambler and profligate, and the dupe of all the adventurers who choose to flatter him. You, my mother, I have heard named as one of the queens of society, one of those who, as the milliners say, set the fashions—whose toilettes are described by journalists—whose beauty, taste, and elegance are lauded to the skies; and whose adventures and witticisms are in everybody's mouth. I have asked myself, on hearing all this, what sort of a mother you were to endure your son's conduct, and what sort of a son Philippe could be to tolerate his mother's behaviour."

Terrified at the sight of these two angry women, Raymond was almost tempted to try and silence Simone. Would she not injure herself and her own cause by this display of violence? "You shall pay dearly for this humiliation!" muttered the duchess.

But still undaunted, Simone threw back her head. Like a slave who has cast off his fetters, she seemed incapable of restraining herself. "At last,"

she continued, drawing a long breath, "your last louis was gone. You were ruined—your son and yourself. All your property that was not sold was mortgaged, money-lenders refused you anything more, tradesmen denied you credit, and, in utter bewilderment, you turned to me. For three years you had not answered one of my letters, but you came here one winter's morning—you did not recognise me—and you said, 'How you are changed, my poor child!'"

Raymond stood by the chimney, and he could see that the duchess's eyes were flashing with hatred. "I was changed indeed!" continued Simone. "I came here three months after my father's death, accompanied by Miss Dodge and Tardif, my father's man of business. I was only a child—I was ignorant of the value of money, and I knew nothing of the management of a large landed estate. You fancy that this exile cost me nothing. You are mistaken, for my tastes were then much like those of other girls of my age and station. I loved society, travelling, pictures, music, and pretty things. But I had a mission to fulfil—I wished to become the manager of Maillefert.

"Under Maître Tardif's guidance I learned the details of agricultural life. I rose at daybreak and overlooked my men. I learned the value of my crops, and, in short, in less than two years, when Maître Tardif died, I had made very great progress."

The duchess raised her hands to heaven. "How happy I ought to be," she said, "To have such an accomplished daughter!"

This was also the opinion of Raymond, who was touched almost to tears by the self-abnegation which the frail, delicate creature before him had displayed.

"The people about me," Simone resumed, "could not understand my conduct. I became the heroine of the most preposterous romances, while some persons considered me a phenomenon of Avarice."

"Let me congratulate you on the choice you have made, Monsieur Delorge," hissed the duchess at this point.

"And it was true," said Simone, "I was avaricious. I denied myself every superfluity or luxury, I economized, for I expected you, and you came. You were humble on that occasion. You made no allusion to complete and absolute ruin, you only talked of being momentarily inconvenienced. But I, who knew the truth, listened to you in sorrow. I entreated you to economize—to lessen your expenditure. I advised several things. You listened, and you promised a total reform, and ended by asking for four hundred thousand francs, which would release you from all your difficulties. It was an enormous sum, it constituted the savings of two years, and my reason told me that as for freeing you it was a mere grain of sand. However you were my mother, I was weak, and I gave you the money."

"And made me pay dearly enough for it afterwards," muttered the duchess.

To Raymond's surprise, tears came to Simone's eyes:

"The next day," she said, "I was obliged to go out very early. When I returned at noon, joyfully thinking of seeing you, I was told that you had gone. I could not believe it, for only the evening before we were making arrangements together for your settling yourself at the château. But it was true, you were gone, and you had left behind you a note for me, saying that a telegram had summoned you to Paris for a great charity ball. A fortnight later my brother wrote to me to send him twenty thousand francs for a debt of his. I sent them. The next month you wanted a trifle for dress-making—

five hundred louis—and thus, week after week letters kept coming, sometimes from you, sometimes from my brother, on different pretexts, but all of them pressing and crying for money, money ! ”

Disturbed by Raymond's fixed look, Madame de Maillefert turned her back on him, and with her hands clasped on her knee, beat time with her head to a tune which she hummed through her set teeth.

“ This was the end of my peace,” resumed Simone. “ Correspondence was not enough. You began to draw on me at sight. I soon saw that this would not do, so I wrote to you that I should not pay your drafts, but you kept on. I did not flinch. I refused to pay, and I was then beset by your creditors. At all events, you and Philippe had still treated me with seeming kindness. Sharp recriminations, bitter reproaches, and hard words did not pass your lips. But one day everything became changed, and you appeared before me with angry eyes and threatening lips. You did not say, ‘ I beg of you,’ you said, ‘ You shall—I insist.’ However I was firm. You had taken three years' savings from me, and I asked myself if I ought to go on. I was even compelled to borrow for our needs here at the time. However, there then came other straits. You won some of the people of the neighbourhood on your side. They called me a child, and finally I agreed to send you ten thousand francs monthly.”

Madame de Maillefert wanted to seem deaf to her daughter's words, but these reproaches were too much for her, and she suddenly burst forth : “ This is disgraceful ! Ah ! Monsieur Delorge, you remained here against my will. This audacity shall cost you dear.”

Meanwhile Simone continued : “ Again your tactics changed : you were once more the tender, caressing mother, professing such fondness for me that you could not live without me. You sighed for the calm, peaceful life that might be yours if I would consent to live with you in Paris. You would be a changed woman, you said. I thought to myself that if I managed your house I could do more with two hundred thousand francs than you could with a million. My father had never spent two hundred thousand francs a year, and yet he lived like a true nobleman. However a few words dropped by one of the friends you brought down with you enlightened me in season, and I told you I could not leave the château. Your disappointment must have been very great, for your mask dropped, and you showed all your envy and hate. I saw that, in yours and Philippe's eyes, I was a legitimate prey. You pillaged me, you pillaged the château. You carried off all the pictures, rare tapestry, and carvings. ‘ What good are they to you ? ’ you said, as you took them. Philippe carried off the portraits of our ancestors, under the pretext that they belonged to him, the sole male heir. I did not realize at the time that as many of them represented celebrated persons, he would sell them at a high price.”

“ That is false,” cried the duchess.

“ No, madame, he did sell them, and I bought them back. But why so horrified ? You may surely traffic with the portraits, when you do so with the name you bear. Did not Philippe sell our name when he allowed it to be printed on the prospectus of some speculative enterprise ? Did you not sell it the day you came here on this mission ? You were paid, I know it ; and if ever the Tuileries are invaded by a revolutionary crowd, your receipt will be found there.”

As pale as death the duchess now started to her feet. “ I will not hear another word,” she said.

She had been kept in her chair by her determination not to leave her

daughter and Raymond alone together; but now, realizing that all her efforts were useless, she turned towards him: "You insisted on remaining here," she said, "against my will. I am but a woman, and I yield the place. Were I a man I should act differently." So saying she opened the door of her bed-room, but before retiring she turned, for Simone had just exclaimed: "I have yet only spoken of the past."

"What do you mean?" quickly asked the duchess.

"I have something to say of the present—of this last visit to Maillefert—of your attempts for the last six weeks——"

"Take care, Simone, you do not know me yet," interrupted the duchess, but seeing that her daughter was determined to proceed, she abruptly returned to her chair.

"On the very evening of your arrival," said Simone, "you said to me, not in these words, but to all intents and purposes, 'Give us the half of all you have and we will let you rest.' And but for my oath, most gladly would I have yielded. Rest! How I long for it! I promised to give you a hundred thousand francs for your *début* at court this winter, and I promised to organize the *fête* which would propitiate your mission here."

Raymond had heard a great deal, but he felt that there was something even worse to come. In fact, he noticed that the duchess was now rather anxious than enraged.

"This was our position, my mother," continued Simone, "when, on the day after your arrival, an event took place which will affect all my future life." She stopped, her voice failed her, and colour rose to her cheeks.

"Mademoiselle!" cried Raymond.

But with a sad smile she shook her head, and continued: "A young man of the neighbourhood, dazzled by my fortune, had annoyed me by his attentions and letters, and ended by a proposal which I declined. This person, Monsieur Bizet de Chènehutte, having grossely insulted me, a stranger took up my defence; and an hour after the scene took place, it was reported to your friend Clélie by her maid. It was in this way I knew of it, and knew, too, that a duel would take place on the next day. The ardent imagination of the Duchess de Maumussy was fired by the idea of a man risking his life for a woman whom he did not know. She kept on saying to me that such devotion was unusual. I was moved, touched, and grateful. There was, then, I thought, one being in the world who was interested in the poor deserted Simone."

"Simone!" exclaimed her mother, "you are ill, my child; you are not yourself to talk like this."

"That evening," the girl continued, "my prayers were longer than usual. I could not sleep that night. I rose with the dawn, and I sent Saint-Jean to make inquiries, and I discovered that my defender was one of the engineers who had been here for some weeks."

"Of course," said her mother, with a nervous laugh, "it never occurred to you to ask yourself if your unknown defender had heard of your fortune. Do you think he would have fought for a dowerless girl?"

Simone did not condescend to notice this insult. "As was only too natural," she continued, "I earnestly desired to become acquainted with this stranger who had thus undertaken my defence. Your ball was to take place, so I ordered an invitation to be sent to him."

"Simone! unhappy girl! By the name you bear, I command you to stop!" cried Madame de Maillefert.

The girl shook her head. "Yes, I know I am passing the bounds of

propriety. But is this my fault? It is you—my own mother—who have compelled me to defend my honour at the price of modesty. But you have compelled me to it—I shall tell the truth—I shall own that the first time I saw Monsieur Delorge I felt an interest in him. He understood my sorrows, and when Philippe was at the card-table that dreadful night, he realized what I felt. However, Monsieur Delorge did not please you, and the last of your guests had not gone when you began reproaching me bitterly for having compromised myself by dancing with him after refusing others. Perhaps you were right, for I know nothing of society and its rules.”

The duchess was wild with impatience, and yet it was clear that she dared not retire. “How long is this to last?” she asked, contemptuously. “It seems to me that this explanation may go on for ever!”

“The next day, mamma, all your ideas were changed, or rather the night had inspired you with others. You were now delighted with Monsieur Delorge. The most fulsome praise now followed scornful jesting. You wished him to be a constant guest at the château. You went in search of him. And Philippe agreed with you, as did all your guests, with the exception—let me do her the justice to say so—of Madame de Maumussy. My heart told me that there was some conspiracy started. Do you remember the day when you took me aside, and with caresses and tender entreaties, drew my secret from me?—when you said: ‘Very well—marry him. Divide your property with your brother, and I will throw no obstacle in your path!’”

Raymond, the duchess, and Simone were so excited that they forgot to reflect upon the strangeness of their position and conversation. However, the girl went on: “After having trafficked with everything else, you now began to speculate on my affections. Poor fool that I was! I allowed you to read my heart like an open book. I allowed you to see that I felt I had found in M. Raymond Delorge an honest friend whose arm would sustain me. You know that I said to myself: ‘He will accept half of the burden which I find too heavy. For my sake he will work for my people. He will aid me with his advice and energy, and save us all!’”

Raymond could no longer contain himself. “Ah! mademoiselle,” he cried, “you judged me aright.”

But Simone did not seem to hear him. Still looking her mother straight in the face, she continued: “I would not listen to your bargaining. I told you that I would pay no such price. You would not believe me. My energetic protestations only brought a smile to your lips, and you said, in an ironical tone, ‘You will think better of it when you realize that you cannot become the wife of the man you love in any other way. Some day you will come on your knees to ask my consent, and may be my terms will be harder than now.’”

“Abominable!” muttered Raymond, “abominable!”

“All this time,” continued Simone, “you, my mother, did your best to encourage Monsieur Delorge. I ought to have spoken to him then; but to accuse my mother seemed a crime in my eyes, and so I could do nothing but try to avoid him. I felt all the time, however, that everything was not yet finished. I felt that you had only closed your door to this gentleman because you had not renounced the hope of conquering me. And if my own presentiments had not warned me, your friend, the Duchess de Maumussy, would have done so.”

Madame de Maillefert started. “Clélie! Did Clélie tell you that——”

She stopped short. “Tell me what?” asked her daughter. The mother

did not reply. Then in a clear, full voice, vibrating with lawful indignation, Simone resumed the recapitulation of her wrongs: "That a mother, basely jealous of her daughter, should overwhelm her with insults, has been occasionally seen. That an extravagant brother should ruin his sister and take her last louis from her, may be imagined. And that a mother and a brother should league together against a poor girl, and murder her to gain possession of her money, is a possibility. But that a brother and a mother should deliberately, methodically, and with patent premeditation, dishonour their sister and their daughter, is absolutely beyond belief."

The duchess tried to speak, but the words expired in her throat.

"And yet this is what you did—you, my mother, and Philippe, my brother. You thought that between my reputation and the oath I had sworn to my father I should not hesitate, and that to regain my honour, lost through you, I should abandon the prize you coveted. And you went about with an air of the most hypocritical grief, saying that I, Simone de Maillefert, your own daughter, was the mistress of Monsieur Raymond Delorge."

Shaken from head to foot by absolute convulsions of rage, Madame de Maillefert tore the lace from her *peignoir* in handfulls. "It is false!" she cried "it is an abominable calumny!" Never did Philippe or I say anything so atrocious!"

But Raymond walked straight towards her, and with flashing eyes exclaimed—"You did precisely say that to Madame de Larchère, and she repeated it."

"Madame de Larchère lied!"

"No one repeated it to me, mamma," retorted Simone, "I heard you say it."

"You heard it! Then why did you not deny it?"

The poor child shook her head. "What would have been the good? Because my honour was gone should I compromise yours? Who would believe that a mother could calumniate her daughter! I was silent, and if I have spoken to-day it is because you have compelled me to do so—it is because I wish Monsieur Raymond Delorge to know us as we are—you and I—before we separate for ever."

The duchess looked at Raymond and at Simone as they stood side by side. "You refuse your consent, do you?" she said. "Remember that the blame will be yours whatever may happen." And then she passed into her bedroom, slamming the door after her with such violence that a mirror was thrown down and shattered.

V.

SIMONE sank into a chair, hiding her face in her hands. "I am lost, indeed!" she cried.

Raymond repeated her words as if he did not understand their meaning "What a woman this duchess is!" he murmured; but suddenly remembering that these were the last moments he might ever pass with the woman he loved, he determined to avail himself of them. And he bent over her and tried to take her hand. She started and looked up at him with wild and haggard eyes. "You heard your mother?" he said.

"Alas! yes," gasped the poor child, between her sobs.

"She will never forgive your just indignation—she will never pardon you for having heard what she said."

"Never!"

"She will avenge herself in some way, and who can tell what terrible extremities her vindictive hatred will impell her to?"

"Alas!" the girl replied, "I have the worst to fear."

"Then, we must take a decisive step," said Raymond. "Do you trust me?"

She looked at him with grieved surprise and her face flushed. "After all that has passed," she murmured, "how can you ask that question?"

Raymond's heart beat quickly. "Then," he eagerly replied, "instead of acting on the defensive, attack. Madame de Maillefert desires your capital. Refuse her the income unless she gives her consent. Tell her firmly that she shall not have a louis until she had granted it."

Simone withdrew her hand. "No, I cannot do that," she cried.

"But it means safety."

"That may be, but it would also be answering their shameful behaviour by a shameful act. My property is not my own. I simply hold it in trust. It belongs by right to my mother and brother. I have no right to deprive them of it."

Hope fled from Raymond's heart. "You would not need to deprive them of it," he answered. "The very moment that your mother believes you to be in earnest, she will yield."

"Ah! you do not know my mother."

"I know that she must have money—that she must have it at any price."

"That is true; but her pride and her obstinacy are even greater than her covetousness."

"She will yield," repeated Raymond.

A bitter smile passed over Simone's lips. "You think me braver than I am," she said. "I could never have the courage to say that to my mother. I have never opposed her except passively. I ask myself even now how I have dared to speak as I have done to-day."

"Then you intend to remain here," asked Raymond.

"Alas!"

"In the power of a woman who hates you—whom no consideration can restrain—"

"Where should I go?"

A sudden inspiration, sent, as Raymond believed, directly from heaven, flashed through his mind. "Listen to me," he cried: "You can place this fortune in the hands of a man of business, who will manage it according to your directions, the proceeds to be devoted to your mother."

"And I—"

"You," repeated Raymond, and kneeling at Simone's feet he caught hold of her hands, and continued breathlessly, intoxicated with hope and love—"You," he said, "will take my arm, and this very moment, go with me out of the château."

"Go away with you?"

"Yes—I will take you to my mother, who is a good brave woman—to my sister, who is the best and purest of girls, and sustained by them, you will wait for the time when you will be able to dispose of your hand without your mother's consent." He forgot, poor boy, that only the evening before he had been filled with terror at thinking of what his mother would say when she heard of his marriage plans.

"It is utterly impossible!" said Simone,

"And why, in the name of heaven?"

"Because it would give to my mother's calumny an appearance of truth,—because these calumnies would follow me to your house—because Madame Delorge, who might be willing to give an asylum to her son's betrothed would refuse it to a woman who is called his mistress."

Hearing a door open, Raymond started to his feet. The duchess's maid stood on the threshold with a most detestable smile on her face, as she said: "I beg pardon—if I had known——"

"What do you want?" asked Raymond sternly.

"The Baron de Boursonne sent to ask, sir, if you had forgotten that he was waiting?"

"Tell the baron that I will be with him presently. Go at once."

She left the room, but her impudent smile stung Raymond like a poisoned arrow. "God only knows what this impudent creature will say," he remarked.

"My mother sent her, I am sure," rejoined Simone; and as her arms fell to her side with a weary gesture, she added—"What does it all matter?"

A conviction of his own powerlessness weighed like lead on Raymond's heart. "And it is I," he said, "who have brought all these cruel sufferings on you. It is I, who would give my very life for you, who brings these tears to your eyes. Oh! forgive me! I am mad and selfish. The very day when I saw you for the first time, that day when I knew I loved you with my whole heart, I ought to have turned and fled. Did I not know what fatal curse was on me? Has not experience shown me that I bring misery with me wherever I turn?"

Simone sat listening with colourless trembling lips, and a scarlet spot on either cheek.

"Yes, I ought to have gone at once," continued Raymond, "and one evening I said to myself I will go to-morrow. The morrow came, and I lacked the courage. My life had been one long agony. I saw all at once the sun of happiness rising for I loved you. I ventured to believe that I could win your love. I forgot all the past and the future in my new-born hope. At times, I unquestionably seemed very strange to you. I was strange—I was afraid of myself. I adored you, and I dreaded lest the secret should escape my lips, lest you should read it in my eyes."

Simone rose from her seat and stood leaning on the back of a chair. But he went on with growing vehemence—"I loved you and your mere presence paralyzed my brain. Under your eyes the words died away on my lips. The rustle of your dress sent the blood to my face. Ah! what violence I did myself not to fall at your feet and say, 'I love you! I love you!' Sometimes I fancied I could read in your eyes what I wished to read in them, and I left the château intoxicated with joy, to return and find but icy indifference, if not disdain." Simone tried to stop him. But he continued: "One evening we were with your mother driving, and she dropped me at the bridge. As I said good-night, you leaned from the carriage and extended your hand. I took it and fancied I felt a slight pressure, which I regarded as a promise and an oath. I stood in a sort of stupor watching the carriage drive off until you were out of sight, saying to myself: 'Is it true?'"

Blushing and confused, Simone's lips parted, and she cried: "Why should I be ashamed to own that I love you, Raymond? No, I am proud to own it."

Raymond turned pale.

"Great God!" he exclaimed, "I thank you. This moment makes amends for all the past." And delirious with happiness, he caught Simone in his arms and covered her fair hair with kisses.

But she quickly released herself. "Ah!" she cried, "do you not know that time is flying? Do you forget that my mother's hatred creates an unconquerable barrier between us?"

Raymond's face glowed with enthusiasm. "There are no insurmountable barriers to a love like ours."

Simone shook her head. "The doors of Maillefert are closed to you, and we are separated."

Raymond's face fell. "And you," he said, in a dreary tone, "are in the power of my enemies—in the same house as Combeldaine, Verdale, and the Maumussys. But why are they here?" he asked abruptly.

"For nothing specially, I believe. Monsieur de Maumussy comes for his wife, and his two friends accompany him."

Raymond shook his head. "Your mother is unscrupulous. These men may be her accomplices."

"Forewarned is forearmed," answered Simone. "I shall be on my guard." But she stopped short, for she could hear her mother and Philippe speaking in the next room. "Fly!" she said. Raymond threw back his head haughtily.

"Yes, instantly!" she added. "Will you agonize me by letting me see you and my brother armed against each other? I will write to you; we will meet again. But if you love me, you will go now."

Simone was quite right. Had he found himself just then face to face with Philippe, stimulated by the duchess, there would have been one of those quarrels which can end only in mortal combat. Still he did not move. The word "fly" nailed his feet to the floor—for it seemed suggestive of cowardice. There was evidently an angry discussion going on between the mother and son, for they spoke in loud voices. Trembling like a leaf, Simone clasped her hands entreatingly. "Raymond," she cried, piteously, "pray go! Listen to me rather than to the dictates of your own pride."

He yielded. "I obey you," he replied, not without some bitterness. "I go—carrying with me the conviction that your honour, your life, are imperilled. How am I to know how you are?"

"You shall have word from me every day."

"You promise it?"

"I swear it?" answered Simone, raising her hand and speaking in a grave and ringing voice.

"God help us!" said Raymond, as he kissed Simone's forehead; "for He alone can save us!" And then he left the room in which he had been raised to the heights of joy, only to be cast down again to the depths of despair.

He tried to compose himself, as he expected to meet the assassins of his father face to face, and he was going slowly down the marble stairs when at a turn he suddenly came upon Madame de Maumussy. She had just returned from riding; her complexion was bright from exercise, and her superb black eyes, full of life and energy, sparkled under the brim of the masculine hat she wore. With one hand she held up her riding-habit, while in the other she carried her gloves and whip. Raymond stood against the wall to allow her to pass. But she stood still, and looked at him earnestly. "Why," she said, abruptly—"why do you look like that?"

Was this woman Madame de Maillefert's accomplice, and what part did she play in the intrigue which was progressing around Simone? This was what Raymond could not divine. He simply knew that Madame de Maumussy had been taken into the duchesse's confidence, and that he therefore, had no reason to conceal the events of the morning from her. "I look like this, madame, because I have just asked the Duchess de Maillefert for the hand of her daughter."

"You have?" cried Madame de Maumussy, starting.

"Yes, madame."

"And the dear duchess refused you?"

"She made impossible conditions."

A disdainful smile curled the lady's lips. "Madame de Maillefert exacted her daughter's fortune, probably."

"Her daughter's capital—yes."

"And you would not relinquish it?"

"I would not? Good heavens, madame!"

"Then Simone would not——" insisted the young duchess. And with an air of disgust she continued: "I am perfectly astonished at the rapacity and love of money which this family exhibit. They care for nothing but money, think only of money, talk about it, quarrel over it, and then are only reconciled through it. It is simply revolting!"

Raymond could not bear this. "You know very well," he said, "that Mademoiselle Simone is unselfishness itself."

"Then why does she not divide her fortune with her brother?"

"She gives her entire income to her mother and brother, but she is bound by an oath not to dispose of her capital."

The duchess shrugged her shoulders. "Say, rather, that she is determined to manage and control, save and order. She is just like the others in her love of money. An oath, indeed! Women who love don't care much for oaths. Simone has too much head to be endowed with much heart. She is one of those girls who, according to the chances of life, become heroines or martyrs; but wives or mistresses—never!"

Raymond shuddered; but to all appearance he was unmoved. "You hate Mademoiselle Simone," he said.

"I hate her! Why on earth should I hate her?"

Raymond could not tell her why, although he had a clear perception of the truth. "If you do not hate her," he said, "why do you speak of her want of heart? Why do you not come to her assistance? She is wretched."

"About as wretched as this marble on which we stand!"

"Would it not be a noble act on your part to help this poor child who is so abominably persecuted? You are all-powerful with your hostess. She fears you, and wishes to be on good terms with you." He was entreating her. He, the son of General Delorge, was imploring a favour of the wife of the Duke de Maumussy. "I am filled with fear," he continued, "when I think of the covetousness of the duchess and her son."

Madame de Maumussy averted her eyes. "Perhaps," said she, "if this young lady's security and peace of mind are of such importance to you, you had better give her up entirely——"

"And why? Give me a reason."

"I have none to give; but believe me my advice is good."

Raymond darted at the young duchess one of those searching glances which are calculated to draw the truth from the innermost depths of the

soul. "Can I believe in the sincerity of advice coming from you?" he asked.

"And why not? Ah! because I am the Duchess de Maumussy, and because I know your story, Monsieur Delorge!" And snapping her whip with an air of superb insolence, she added: "Am I responsible for the acts of the Duke de Maumussy? He is my husband, to be sure, but did I choose him? Do his hates or his likings affect me in any way? I am not Mademoiselle Simone; I am Clélie! What do I care for the Duke de Maumussy? Let me meet to-morrow a man whom I love and who loves me and you will see, duchess as I am, that I will take his arm and boldly proclaim him as my lover."

Her hearer was confounded by her audacity, for she spoke very loudly, in a clear ringing voice, careless of the fact that the hall below was filled with servants. "Believe me, Monsieur Delorge," she continued, "it is a friend who speaks to you. Give up Simone; it is for her interest and for your own that you must forget her." And without waiting for his reply, she gathered up the ample folds of her skirt, rapidly ascended the few remaining steps and disappeared.

The young man looked after her, utterly bewildered by the events of the morning. Was the young duchess mocking him, or did she love him, and did she hate Simone on account of that? Plausible as this last explanation was, he did not care to admit it, on account of the ridiculous position in which it placed him. "I see distinctly that she has something against Simone," he muttered. "But what? Who can divine what detestable ideas may have been put in her head by her hostess?" He asked himself why he should not fight his enemies with their own weapons. What prevented him from promising, and not keeping his promises? What prevented him from pretending to give up Simone, and attaching himself to the young duchess and extracting her secret from her? Yes; but Simone, so proud and dignified, would never lend herself to this degrading comedy, and he would be left to play it alone. Disgust would overcome him, and he would drop his mask long before it was time to do so. "No—no," he said; "better be dupes ourselves than that." And, in haste to quit the château, he hurried down the stairs, and crossed the vestibule to the room, where he had left the baron, and the door of which was open.

Seeing that his friend was there with two other persons, he hesitated. Near one of the windows there sat a man who was carelessly reading a newspaper, now and anon casting an impatient glance out of doors, where the rain was falling slowly but persistently. It was De Maumussy. He had aged considerably. His hair was much thinner, and very gray; his eyes had lost their cynical flash; his cheeks hung loose; while the deep wrinkles on his temples and his compressed lips revealed the devouring cares and anxieties of his brilliant and envied existence. Raymond's heart swelled with rage at the sight of this man who was one of his father's murderers; and averting his glance and looking towards the centre of the room he espied Verdale, Roberjot's former friend, talking with the baron.

Verdale was no longer the lank unappreciated architect, who had once dragged his huge portfolio full of disdained plans and sketches about with him through Paris. Success glowed on his face, and at each movement he seemed to burst with prosperity, like a bag filled too plentifully with gold. M. de Boursonne was speaking to the architect in that tone of quiet impertinence which he always used with people who displeased him. "I have known you, sir, by reputation for a long time," he said. "The part you

played in the transformation of Paris is too considerable for you not to be well known. Besides, I have heard you spoken of by your early companions at school." Verdale's annoyance was very evident. "You have pulled down a great deal," continued the baron.

"Only where it was necessary, sir. Sunshine and air were needed—is it not health and wealth to let floods of light into the narrow, unhealthy, ill-smelling lanes of old Paris?"

"Yes, I know. I read that in the reports."

"Those reports were but the feeble expression of the truth."

"Oh! of course. I am inclined to think, however, that pulling down is better from a financial view than putting up. I mean it is more of a money-making business. I have built—Heaven knows how many bridges and viaducts, turned out any number of docks, and miles on miles of canals, but where am I? I have never made more than eight or ten thousand francs in a year."

"But you are an officer of the Legion of Honour!"

"And you will be one too."

"Very true; but——"

"Moreover, after pulling down more than I have ever built, you have made a fortune of several millions."

The baron thought he was teasing Verdale, in point of fact, he was positively torturing him. "Is success a crime?" asked the architect bitterly.

The engineer laughed. "Not in my eyes, I assure you; for I know nothing more respectable than a fortune honestly and laboriously acquired—one of those fortunes each silver-piece of which represents some task accomplished or some privation endured."

Raymond had heard steps behind him in the corridor. To have yielded to Simone's entreaties, and then to be found below by the young duke, was worse than to have remained up stairs. And surmounting the horror which M. de Maumussy inspired him, he entered the room.

The baron turned on hearing him enter, and exclaimed: "Ah! my dear Delorge, you have come at last? I really began to think you had forgotten me, and had gone off without me."

"Did not the maid tell you that I would be with you in a few moments?"

"What maid?"

"The same one you sent to me."

The baron looked quite wild. "I haven't sent a soul," he answered.

Simone was right, then. It was her mother who had despatched the impudent servant girl. But Raymond had no time for comment, for De Maumussy had laid down his newspaper, and coming forward said in a tone of the most studied politeness: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge, if I am not mistaken——"

Raymond recoiled involuntarily with the look of a man who sees a serpent rear its head in his path. "The son of General Delorge—yes, sir?" he replied. His tone was full of hatred, but the duke did not seem to notice it.

"Perhaps you do not recognize me?" he said, blandly.

"You are the friend of M. de Combelaïne, are you not? You are the Duke de Maumussy, I believe?"

"It is a long time since we met."

"It will be seventeen years the day after to-morrow that I saw you for the first time, sir, and under circumstances that I am not likely to forget. It was three days after the murder of my father!"

Instead of evincing the slightest indignation, the duke shook his head sadly. "Ah!" he muttered, "still the same unjust accusation."

Raymond did not notice these words. "You then had the unheard of audacity," he continued, "to present yourself before my mother to offer her a pension—the price of blood."

"I obeyed the voice of my conscience, sir. A great and terrible misfortune had come to you, and I sought to soften its consequences as far as lay in my power. I should have been glad to serve you."

"Yes, so you said then. It was easy to say it to a defenceless woman and helpless child."

A faint smile passed over the duke's lips. "Excuse me!" he replied, "you had one defender, and a terrible one he was, too—an old servant, who threatened me with a pistol, and who really wished to kill me."

"And who, but for my mother, would have done so. You will never see death so near you again but once."

The baron was struck by the fact that the more excited Raymond became, the more conciliatory his antagonist showed himself. "Nevertheless," said the duke, "my feelings towards you are still unchanged. I should be as glad to serve you to-day as I was then."

"Nor am I changed!" Raymond answered, fiercely; "I believe to-day, as I did then—in the future. The distance which separated us then has diminished—you are not so high, nor I so low."

M. de Maumussy replied in a gentle tone: "Heaven is my witness that I came to you with the kindest motives."

"Kindest motives!" cried Raymond. "Have you forgotten everything? Do you forget that to-day is the 1st of December, 1869. Has no voice ever awakened you in the middle of the night with threats of vengeance? Have you forgotten that seventeen years ago my father, General Delorge fell—murdered in the Garden of the Elysée?"

But the baron clutched his arm impatiently. "Come," he said, "Come."

Raymond followed him to the door; and when his hand was on the knob he turned and said, in a low voice to Maumussy: "As for myself, I tremble at the thought of the reappearance of Laurent Cornevin!"

The servants had heard something of this altercation, and they looked after the two gentlemen with a singular expression. The baron was furious, and as they went down the avenue he exclaimed: "I swear, Raymond, I am almost of De Maumussy's opinion. I think you are mad. What on earth is the use of this quarrel—and these threats?"

"There is none, I suppose—but the sight of this man puts me out of myself. Any one less cowardly than Combelaïne would send me a challenge."

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "First of all," he said, "tell me what took place while I was waiting for you." And when Raymond told him he remarked: "Do you realize that a reconciliation with this man would insure your marrying Simone?"

Raymond started. "I never thought of that. But at that price! Never! I would sooner renounce her!"

VI.

THE two friends were drenched to the skin when they reached the Rising Sun, and Master Béru declared that he could not understand why they had not been kept at the château, or at least sent back in a carriage. "If

Madame de Maillefert's friends came down to have any shooting," he added, "they will have their labour for their pains, for the weather threatens to be very bad!"

The innkeeper had touched on the very point which puzzled the baron. Why had these men come to the château in the month of December? They had certainly not abandoned Paris, and their interests there, for the mere pleasure of travelling together. In fact, De Combelaïne and Maumussy hated each other cordially, and were only bound together by their past complicity. Verdale, moreover, had too often refused to lend them money to seek their society with any especial eagerness. There was some milk in the cocoa-nut no doubt, and their presence suggested the possibility of a new combination devised by the duchess, and directed against her daughter's fortune. "Why, too," thought the baron, "should De Maumussy have been so patient under the accusations which Raymond flung so hotly in his face. It was very strange. He evidently had an idea or the hope of a reconciliation. Or it may be that he has reasons which you are ignorant of for fearing you."

"May it not be," asked Raymond, "that he thinks the empire stands less firmly than it did?"

Early in the month of December, 1869, the gilding on many of the imperial idols had been roughly effaced by the talented pamphleteer Henri Rochefort. The Duke de Maumussy and the Count de Combelaïne had each had their page in *La Lanterne*. A terrible page, which particularized little, but every phrase in which was an accusation, and each word a threat. De Combelaïne wished to challenge Rochefort, but De Maumussy, on the contrary, affected to laugh, for he well knew how necessary it was for him to keep quiet, and prompt no talk about himself. Again, "the black specks on the sky," to which the emperor had alluded in a celebrated speech, developed into terrible clouds, charged with thunder and flashes of lightning. Once more did the government feel the periodical necessity of "doing something." Some were eager for a *coup d'état* to sweep away all the liberties which had been conceded after seventeen years' struggle. Others, on the contrary, wished "to crown the edifice," hoping that this erection, the Second Empire, founded on the bloodshed of December, would be solid enough to support the crown of liberty.

After dinner at the Rising Sun, while the two engineers were sitting by the fire, the postman brought in an extremely bulky letter. It came from Jean Cornevin, and was dated Australia, having been sent on by the obliging lawyer, M. Roberjot. "It seems as if no emotion were to be spared me to-day," muttered Raymond.

The baron took up the letter. "Shall I read it to you?" he asked, and hardly waiting for a reply he tore it open, and began to peruse it aloud: "To all my dear Friends—At last after hundreds of disappointments—after months of anxiety and suspense, I have something positive to tell. Read and judge for yourselves. The last time I wrote I was at the hotel in Melbourne, awaiting the return of Pécheira, the banker, from the gold mines. Twice a day I went to his office to know if he had returned, but the answer was always the same. 'We have not heard from him,' said one or another of the clerks. 'He may be on the other side of Ballarat.' I was beginning to think seriously of going in search of my man, when yesterday morning who should call on me but the head clerk. 'My master came last night,' he said, 'and he is waiting for you.' In a moment I was ready, and rushing through the streets, as if I were crazy, I entered Pécheira's office. I found him to be a very handsome fellow, about forty, with a keen eye, and

abrupt manners, but still with every intention of being polite. As soon as I entered, he held out his hand as to an old acquaintance. 'You are Cornevin's son?' he said. 'Which are you? Léon or Jean?' I nearly fell from my chair at the idea of this man knowing our names. 'I am Jean, sir,' I said. He smiled. 'Then you are the painter?' 'How do you know that?' I asked. 'I do know it, and in the same way I know that your brother has been educated at the Polytechnic School, and is now an engineer; that your good, worthy mother has a dressmaking establishment in the Rue de la Chaussée d'Antin; and that you have three sisters, three charming young girls, called Clarisse, Eulalie, and Louise.' He then went on to speak of the noble courageous woman, the wife of General Delorge—of our friends Doucoudray and Roberjot. Upon my word, my dear friends, I did not know whether I was asleep or awake. 'You ask me,' continued Pécheira, 'how I know you all so well. Good heavens! how shouldn't I know something about the family of a man with whom I lived for years like a brother; with whom I have shared dangers and privations, hopes and success—particularly when this man lived, as your father did, only for his family.'

"I was confounded. 'Sir,' I said, 'when my father was taken from us, my mother was in profound distress; there were five of us—the eldest not ten.' Pécheira interrupted me. 'I know that,' he said, 'and this thought nearly killed your father during the two years he heard nothing of you—during the time he obtained no word of reply to all the letters he wrote to your mother.' 'We never received one,' I replied. 'That is just what Cornevin thought,' said Pécheira. As soon as possible he took the only means in his power to ascertain what had become of you. He learned that a providential hand had been extended to you, and that General Delorge's widow had been your salvation. 'Every drop of blood in my veins belongs to her!' he said to me often. He never lost sight of you after that. Day by day, so to speak, he heard of you. We were not together at that time, but he came to visit me every month. 'My wife is making money,' he said, rubbing his hands. 'Her business prospers, and God blesses her labours.' Another time, he remarked. 'My son Léon has just entered the Polytechnic School,' or 'My son Jean has decided talent—he has exhibited a picture which has had a great success.' You were his one thought, and presently I will show you the portraits of you all, with those of Madame Delorge and her son—of M. Ducoudray even; and you will find in my drawing-room the landscape which had such success at the exhibition, and which your father bought."

Great as had been Jean Cornevin's astonishment, it did not equal Raymond's. He, too, asked himself if he were wide awake. But it was no use for him to try to speak, for the baron would not bear any interruption, but hurried eagerly on, with the haste of a man who seeks the denouement he has foreseen.

"The more evidence I saw of my father's affection," wrote Jean, "the more puzzled I was that he should be willing to live apart from us. Pécheira read all this in my eyes. 'We have a great deal to say to each other,' he exclaimed, 'and I have an engagement now. Go back to your hotel and send your baggage here.' I demurred to this. 'Nonsense,' he said. 'The son of Laurent Cornevin can live under no other roof than mine while in Melbourne. My house is yours—do you understand? Do as I say, and make haste. At eleven o'clock I shall be at liberty, and we will breakfast together.' It was then nine. An hour later I had paid my bill and was installed in a comfortable room in Pécheira's house.

"We ate our breakfast, and when the servants had left the room and the doors were closed, my host said, 'Now I will tell you all I know. My father told you how Cornevin came to Talcahuana, under the name of Boutin. He was half famished and in rags, and he asked for work as if it had been alms; and having found it with us, he remained. Never had I seen such industry. To return to France was his one idea, and it was to enable him to do so that he worked with such fierce energy, depriving himself of even the necessities of life rather than diminish his small stock of coin. But money was not made quickly at Talcahuana, and poor Laurent remarked, 'I shall never get enough together to pay my passage.' He lost heart and even at one time, as he told me later, he was tempted to commit suicide. But he heard me say something about going to Australia, where, according to what was said at Valparaiso, nuggets lay like pebbles on the soil. I had had this idea of going to Australia for some time; but my father objected, saying that it was folly to go so far. But when I once get a thing into my head, it is not so easily got out again, and when my father saw this, he gave me leave to go. 'Very well,' I answered; 'I'll do so and I'll take Laurent with me.'

"On the Monday following we left Talcahuana. My father at the last moment regretted the counsel he had given, and did not fill my purse to repletion. He hoped, as he since wrote, that I should spend everything at Valparaiso, and return to him in a month's time. In fact, Laurent and I had but three hundred piasters between us. At Valparaiso we had the greatest difficulty in finding a ship that would take us. But when a man is determined on a thing he generally succeeds in achieving it. An English captain, half of whose crew had been killed by yellow fever, took us on board—Laurent as sailor and I as cook. We asked no wages; we only wanted to be landed in Australia, and six months later, indeed, we touched ground on the unfinished dock of Melbourne.

"'I wished to make money, so did your father, and he said to me the very first evening: 'We must not lose time in Melbourne—let us leave to-morrow for the mines.' We did so—and I will take you to the very spot, where Ballarat now stands, a town which sprang to life, as it were, at the whistle of a machinist, and which to-day numbers thirty thousand inhabitants, and which, like Melbourne, has its thoroughfares lighted with gas, its handsome shops, squares and exchange, its theatres and railway stations. As we saw it, however, it was a strange spot, dug and upheaved by the hand of man, with each little hillock turned over, and scrutinized, each grain of sand examined, washed and sifted—and all this to the roar of machinery, and the noise of pumps and hammers.

"In those days there was no railroad, so we trudged along a dusty highway dotted with horrible taverns noisy with drunken cries and songs. The whole valley of Ballarat was an immense camp, where all the miners herded together. Terrific looking creatures they were, too, covered with mud and dripping with sweat, wandering with a pick-axe in one hand and a revolver in the other, about the country. Neither Laurent nor I were very delicate. We were accustomed to lives of privation and fatigue. We had both been accustomed to the sight of the dregs of humanity, at least. Nevertheless we were frightened at what we now beheld and were forced to undergo. However, we heard that only the night before an old miner had found a nugget of gold weighing two thousand six hundred ounces and worth two hundred and sixty thousand francs. 'We must stay here,' we said to each other, 'and hope for that fellow's luck!' It is true that precisely

at the same moment a hundred thousand other miners said the very same thing, and that this terrible concurrence singularly complicated the task.

"At the beginning we were far from successful. All around us men were growing rich while we found nothing but gravel. But Laurent broke the charm that held us, and one night, after a hard and fruitless day's work, he found a nugget worth five thousand francs. He was overjoyed. 'Four like these,' he said, 'and I start for home.' He was then satisfied with the idea of making enough money at the mines to pay the expenses of the voyage and have a couple of thousand francs in his pocket when he arrived in Paris. 'With that much,' he said, 'I can do what I want.' However he spoke to me less often about his family than before. In despair at not having received any reply to the letters he had written, he had ceased to write himself. 'My poor wife,' he said bitterly, 'courageous and good as she has been, must be dead by now and my children are street vagabonds, if not in prison.' And he added with a frantic air: 'But they shall pay for it, the whole lot of them. To work! to work!'

"Three months later, and we had twenty thousand francs in our common purse, but we met with a terrible misfortune. Our treasure, which we were obliged to keep on our persons, had become a serious inconvenience, and it was decided that Laurent should place it in safety at Melbourne. He started, but was attacked on the road, wounded, robbed, and left half dead. We were ruined, and had to begin again. Another time I got carried away at the gambling table, and lost the fruit of six weeks labour. Nevertheless despite all these disasters we had forty-three thousand francs at the end of a year's time. We divided this sum, and Laurent started to Melbourne to find a vessel about to sail. He said to me, when I stood on the dock just before he went on board the 'Moravian': 'Read the French papers carefully. Before long there will be mention made of Laurent Cornevin.'"

Thus it came to pass that, by dint of careful researches, all these thousands of leagues away in Guyane, Chili, and Australia, Laurent Cornevin had been traced through the first four years of his disappearance.

"It is the hand of Providence;" said Raymond, but the baron made no reply. After taking breath, he continued to read Jean's letter "Pécheira went on to say: 'What Cornevin's plans were he never confided to me in so many words, but I thought I understood them. I knew that he was the one witness of a great crime, and that the authors of the crime had him transported to Guyana. Twenty times and more I had heard him swear vengeance. And knowing his energy and determination, I felt certain that he was meditating some tremendous punishment—as terrible as had been the crime, and that he was only awaiting his opportunity to strike at the scoundrels who had so long enjoyed impunity. It was, therefore, with the greatest attention that I read the Paris papers, the date of which according to my calculations, corresponded with Cornevin's arrival in Paris. But I found nothing in them whatever. I felt surprised at first, and then anxious. I knew that the 'Moravian' had made a very rapid passage, and that none of her passengers had died, so that Laurent must have reached Paris. What had happened to him? Knowing that the people he intended to attack were rich and powerful, and connected with the government, I said to myself: 'Laurent has been guilty of some gross imprudence in some way. He has been again arrested, and is, perhaps, at this very moment on his way back to the Devil's Island with such especial directions that he will certainly never again be able to escape.' I cannot say that I forgot him. That I never can do; but as the months went by he was naturally less in my mind."

"He had been gone nearly a year, when one morning the door opened, and in he walked. I cannot attempt to describe my astonishment. 'Laurent!' I exclaimed, 'havn't you been to France?'"

"'Yes,' said he, 'and staid there four months.' 'And your wife and children?' I asked. 'God has taken care of them. They are well and happy,' he answered. 'You have brought them out here with you?' I asked again. 'I! I have not even spoken to them or embraced them.'

"Knowing the great love Laurent Cornevin felt towards his wife, whose very name made him turn pale, and his children, whom he never spoke of without tears in his eyes, I thought he was jesting. 'What on earth do you mean?' I asked. 'It is exactly this,' he replied, : 'My family all think me dead, and my wife wears widow's weeds.' I saw that he was not in jest, and then all at once I made up my mind that his reason was gone. 'If you have done this thing,' I exclaimed, 'you are certainly mad.' 'I am not mad,' answered Laurent, 'and yet I have done precisely as I told you. It was with the greatest difficulty that I refrained from going to them. But I had the courage to forego the happiness of pressing my wife and my children once more to my heart!' I was petrified with astonishment. 'But why?' I finally exclaimed, 'why?' 'It was necessary, friend Pécheira; and when you know all you will say the same. I rely on you to keep my secret.'

"It was the first time that Laurent Cornevin had fully opened his heart to me. I listened to him with increasing amazement. And even now, after all these years—so great was my attention—I can repeat Laurent's very words. 'One night,' he said 'I was the witness of a cowardly assassination, and the murdered man, before he breathed his last, had time to write a line, which was the proof of the crime. This proof I have done my best to utilize. My conscience commanded it. And this is why the assassins, having done their best to have me shot, carried me off to the Devil's Island, under a name that was not my own. They were powerful, and I was but a poor groom. No one would be disturbed by my disappearance or by my death. This new crime condemned a poor young woman and five children to death, or perhaps to infamy. But what did these wretches care for that, provided all proof of their crime was destroyed? When I left Australia I felt certain that my wife and children were dead, and I had but one idea, one desire—to avenge myself at any price. I still had the line written by the dying man in my possession; but I was situated so low, and the assassins so high, that I felt little hopes that this would avail me much.

"'I felt that it would be almost useless to cry out "I am Laurent Cornevin!" The police would prove that I was Boutin, who had escaped from the Devil's Island. And to tell the truth, I counted as much on my revolver as on this paper. But I determined on the greatest circumspection and prudence. I adopted every precaution and utilized every resource I possessed. No one could live as I have done, among political exiles, without having received much of their confidence—without being initiated into their secret associations—without knowing their meeting places, their chiefs, and their mysterious signs. In fact I had hardly reached Paris at ten in the evening when I met an old companion of mine at Guyana, who offered me hospitality at his house, and placed his funds and his abilities at my disposal. At daybreak I started forth, in quest of my wife and children. It was a difficult task, friend Pécheira, to look for them in the midst of that great city of Paris. If I had only been able to act openly, I might have simplified the task. But, alas!

I was compelled to hide myself, for my enemies were more powerful than ever; and I knew very well that if they once knew of my existence, they would make short work of me. Fortunately, I was greatly changed. Time, privations, misery, and grief, had done their work. I had left Paris a young man; I came home an old one. My new garments also disguised me, and my beard was full and long. I went first to the house I had lived in at the time I was arrested. Not only did the people there know nothing of my wife, but they had never heard the name of Cornevin. Not one of the persons who had lived in the house at my time now remained there. At the very first step, therefore, the clew I held in my hand broke, and I was bewildered. I could not apply to my wife's family—first, because one of my sisters-in-law was the mistress of one of the murderers of General Delorge; nor could I go to the police, as it would have been tantamount to denouncing myself, and throwing myself into the jaws of the wolf.

"I was desperate. For a week I wandered through the poorest parts of the city with the mad hope that I might meet my wife face to face. Sometimes, amid the crowd, I saw a figure which reminded me of her; I said: "It is she!" and rushed off in pursuit. But I was always deceived. Sometimes I was utterly overwhelmed with despair, and I asked myself what was the good of looking on the earth for those who were asleep below it? I had never suffered so much, and with renewed bitterness I swore to be revenged on the people who had inflicted such cruel tortures on me. They were happy, rich, and honoured. They lived in palaces and rolled about in their carriages. I grew wild at the thought that they were, after all, beyond my reach. I could, to be sure, put a ball through the head of one of the wretches. But what was this chastisement compared to the crime? What was this sudden death compared to my years of agony? I had the letter, but where should I take it? I doubted everybody, and trembled to confide it to anyone.

"One Sunday I went into a café to breakfast, and while waiting to be served I carelessly turned over a huge volume which lay on the table near me. It proved to be a directory, and mechanically I looked for my own name, and sat as if stunned when I read: MADAME JULIE CORNEVIN, *Modes et Confections*, Rue de la Chaussée-d'Antin.

"Julie was my wife's name! How could I believe that the poor woman, whom I had left without resources, could have established herself in one of the most fashionable streets in Paris! However, I dashed out of the café, and jumping into a cab I was driven to the address indicated. The drive was a long one, fortunately, for I thus had time to collect myself, and it was with the greatest caution that I questioned the porter of the house. His answers left me without a doubt. It was, indeed, my wife who owned this establishment. I ran up the stairs and rang at the door, which was opened by a young maid, who told me that her mistress had gone out with the young ladies. Then, as I insisted on knowing when I could see Madame Cornevin on important business, she added: "You can go and ask for her in the Rue Blanche, at her friend's, Madame Delorge; she always spends her Sundays there." And, apparently frightened by my strange manner, she shut the door in my face.

"But I was not the same man. All my plans had been changed by these few words—"Madame Cornevin is with her friend Madame Delorge." To think that my wife, the wife of the groom Cornevin, was an intimate friend of the widow of General Delorge! Was it possible? I was perfectly well aware that Julie was my superior in intelligence, but she had no more educa-

tion than I had. How, then, could it have happened that a distinguished lady should receive her on terms of such intimacy? How on earth had my wife been able to get together money enough to establish herself in a part of Paris where the smallest apartments cost an absurdly high rental? These reflections and many others decided me to wait a little before I showed myself. Friend Pécheira, I had been ungrateful enough to doubt God's goodness. To save my wife and my children a miracle was necessary. Was it not? Very well, the miracle had taken place. The day when I was dragged away from my family they found a better friend—the noble, generous widow of General Delorge, the very man whom I had seen assassinated under my very eyes.

“Indeed, Madame Delorge had received my wife—consoled her, encouraged her, and given her the means to live and set up in business. She had taken charge of my eldest son Léon, and had brought him up as if he had been her own child. She had induced a retired merchant, Ducoudray, to take charge of Jean. In short, if Fate had done her worst as regards my own misfortunes, my family now possessed advantages which I could never have given them. It was not in one day, friend Pecheria, that I learned all this. Having determined to give no signs of life, I proceeded with the very greatest circumspection, questioning the shop-keepers and the neighbours with extreme care. I suffered, certainly, in this strange situation, and yet I was not altogether unhappy. Everybody believed me dead. I was like a man risen from the tomb to satisfy himself about those whom he had left behind. I snatched every opportunity to see my wife and children afar off, to meet them in the street, and I felt more strangely than I can describe.

“How sweet were the tears that sprang to my eyes when seeing my wife still robed in her widow's mourning. I said to myself, ‘What would she say if she knew that this man whom she elbowed as she passed by is her husband, Laurent Cornevin?’ But how changed they all were. Guided and instructed by Madame Delorge, my wife carried herself like a true lady. When I saw her so calm and dignified, so imposing in her silk and crape, I could hardly believe that she was the same poor, tired wife I had seen coming home so often from the public wash-house, with her sleeves rolled up to her elbows and carrying her wet linen over her shoulder. My daughters, each with a look of bright intelligence, and wearing fresh dresses and pretty hats, were like young ladies, born and bred. But my two sons astonished me even more. I never tired of following them about and of admiring them when they came from college, with their books under their arms, gay and well-dressed, and always accompanied by an old servant, as if they belonged to the family of some rich merchant.

“I made all sorts of inquiries, and was told that Jean was a demon, and that he was the torment of all the professors. Léon, on the contrary, was a determined student. Always the first in his class—always carrying off the prizes. Amid all these changes, I was the only one who was unaltered. I had fifteen thousand francs in my belt, but I was still the groom of other days—honest and proud of his honesty, but without education or breeding, common in manner and coarse of speech. I asked myself, when the first shock of seeing me was past, if my wife would not suffer on finding me like this, if my children would not be ashamed of their father's inferiority, and if I, in my own turn, would not be humiliated and irritated by their superior attainments. These reflections were very possibly unjust, but they were natural, and they moderated the ardent desire I felt to resume my place among my family

“Other considerations also influenced me. Thanks to one of my political friends—the one who had given me shelter on my arrival in Paris—I had been informed of the events which had followed the death of General Delorge. I was told that his widow had moved heaven and earth to obtain justice and the punishment of his assassins. I knew that she had done all in her power to find me. I knew, too, that she acted under the advice of her lawyer and friend, M. Roberjot. An inquiry had been started, but it had been promptly suppressed, or rather, it had had been so superficially conducted that the murderers came out of it whiter than snow. But I learned also, and from a certain source, that Madame Delorge had not relinquished her intention and her hopes, but—always on the *qui vive* and armed for a contest—she was quietly awaiting the time when political events would enable her to move. All this was so perfectly well known to the imperial police, that this lady’s house was watched as well as every step she took, and the people with whom she corresponded.

“I decided, after great perplexity, that as our enemies were in the height of success, this was no time to dream of using the weapon in my possession against them. The next thing to decide upon was, whether I should present myself to Madame Delorge and say nothing of the letter. Could I live on my wife’s earnings? The idea filled me with horror. She never ought to be the master, the head of the house. And to prevent this I must be the main support of the family. How could I be that? What could I do with myself? Should I not be an incessant care and humiliation to my wife?

“Finally these reflections inspired me with an heroic determination—a determination that cost me agonies. I said that, as Madame Delorge could wait for the propitious hour, so could I. I swore that I would spend the intervening years in amassing a fortune and improving myself. And effectively I crushed every tender impulse that urged me to make myself known to my family, and I left Paris as I had gone there—secretly; and now I have come to you, friend Pécheira, for counsel and assistance. In six years I must be rich and worthy of my wife.”

VII.

M. DE BOURSONNE paused. The veil which had covered Laurent Cornevin’s life and motives for so long was now torn aside.

“Now I understand!” muttered Raymond. And truly enough all that had been surprising in Cornevin’s conduct was now explained.

The course he had selected might not have been the best, nor yet the wisest, nor that calculated to most surely lead to the revenge he dreamed of, but it was easy to see why he had selected it. It was easy to imagine how his distrust of himself had worked upon him, and how, above all, his pride as a husband and a father had induced him to conceal himself until his return would really prove a material blessing.

“Let us see the end,” said the old engineer. And he resumed the reading of the manuscript.

“From your own emotions, my dear friends,” continued Jean, “you can form some idea of my sensations on hearing this narrative. Poor dear father; I had always known his inflexible honesty, and I know that, humble as was his position, his heart was great. But suddenly he loomed before me in a new light, and with heroic proportions. I could not prevent myself from saying so to Pécheira, but he checked me.

"'Wait a moment,' he said, with a kind smile; 'wait till I have finished! I was bewildered with what your father told me. I was not surprised at his wishing to be rich; young or old, intelligent or stupid, a man always desires that. But that he should educate himself, metamorphose himself, become, in short, a perfect gentleman, to use his own expression, appeared to me a most formidable undertaking. It is not by a mere effort of will that a man of forty can change his skin. And, to tell the truth, your father had a hard task before him, for although he was the best of men, he was also rough, and absolutely without elementary education. I was enough his friend to express my opinion. 'Nevertheless,' he answered, coldly, 'I shall succeed.' There was no use in argument, and I determined to help him. The first thing he wished to do was to find a way of investing, or, rather, of utilizing the ten thousand francs which still remained to him, and it was of no use thinking of the existence we had formerly led, and which had given us our first gains.

"'Things move rapidly in a new country. Australia had already entered into a new phase of her history. Something like order had followed wild confusion, excitement, and extravagance. The days of delirious emotions and priceless nuggets, were over. The sands had given up their richest treasures, and gold must now be sought for in the depths of the earth. Civilization was at work at the mines. Companies were formed—associations which, having large capital at their disposal, with machinery and steam-power, sterilized individual efforts. So the search for gold had now become a trade, like any other—less lucrative, however; for while at Melbourne a carpenter earned his sixteen shillings, or his sovereign per day, a miner did not get more than ten shillings for eight hours' hard work.

"The game, which aroused hot fevers of anxiety with its sudden changes, was now played on 'Change, where men were enriched or impoverished in a brief hour, by buying and selling the stock of these companies, managing the mines. As the company struck good veins or otherwise, its shares fluctuated from a hundred to two hundred pounds in five minutes. It was in speculations of this kind that I had within one month quadrupled the capital which my division with Laurent had left me. Since then, terrified at my good fortune, and fearing to lose in one day what I had made in a month I contented myself with buying gold for export. I explained all this to Laurent. 'Ah!' he said, 'can it be possible that I came back in vain!'

"However, in addition to her mines, Australia possesses another source of wealth, a rich and inexhaustible one—her boundless prairies. The most intelligent emigrants had already abandoned gold seeking for stock-raising, foreseeing that in less than ten years their exports of wools and hides would become enormous. 'That's your business,' I said to Laurent, and he agreed with me.

"Adding to his own ten thousand francs twenty thousand more which I lent to him, he obtained from government the concession of a 'run,' that is to say, of an immense stretch of country on the shores of the Murray. Then he bought sheep and set to work—work which is very difficult and which requires iron health, invincible energy, boundless patience, and rare qualities of foresight and observation to yield a good result. Laurent had all these, and with them full knowledge of animals, which was due to his early career. His run prospered. His speculation, which was intended to furnish food to the miners, succeeded admirably; he paid me what he had borrowed, and in four years possessed half a million of francs to my certain knowledge. It was clear that he had carried out the first part of his programme, which was to make his fortune. To realize the second, to acquire

the instruction he needed, and become a gentleman, was the next. He went to work, and discovered a man belonging to a good family, and possessed of great culture and learning.

"Having found him, they became inseparable companions. This man, who was about forty years old, had left France on account of the misconduct of his wife. He was literally dying of hunger when Laurent found and offered him a home and fifty dollars per month. I was often tempted to laugh when I saw Laurent, always accompanied by his tutor, who said to him, 'You must not do this—you must not do that.' 'Take care—you uttered an oath then.' It was singular, and would have been ridiculous but for the intense gravity shown by your father, and his stubborn determination. Almost insensibly Laurent's manners softened. His ignorance was enlightened. His brain was awakened. He was able to reason and express himself. Laurent lived on his run, a hundred leagues up country, while my affairs kept me at Melbourne, so that I was struck by the increasing change whenever I saw him.

"At each of his visits I recognized a positive improvement. He always came with his tutor when the European mail arrived, and hurried to the post-office, and returned laden with papers, letters, and packages. I do not know whom he had intrusted while he was in Paris with the task of acting as eyes and ears for him; but to say the truth, he was admirably served. Everything was reported—every act of his wife and children, Roberjot and Madame Delorge, and from time to time photographs were sent of those he loved.

"Time passed, and, in addition to my former esteem for Laurent, I now felt a real admiration for the qualities which were developing in him. One morning he rushed into my office pale and out of breath. 'What is it?' I cried much startled. 'A terrible misfortune,' he replied. I thought of that curse of a stock-raiser, a pestilence among his cattle. I thought of an inundation. 'Are you ruined?' I asked. 'No—no—not that,' he answered, in a hoarse voice, as he threw a letter on the table. 'I have news from France,' he added, 'My son Jean has just been arrested!' I was amazed. 'Arrested!' I cried. 'And put in prison,' he rejoined. 'They have sent him to Brest, then to Guyana. 'They? Whom do you mean by they?' 'The wretches, who, after having murdered General Delorge, next disembarrassed themselves of me, the witness of their crime.'

"Were I ever to see such hate in an enemy's eyes as I now read in Laurent's, I should know that my life was in danger. 'But,' he shouted, these ruffians will find their match, and they shall learn what it costs to attack my son.' I tried to calm him, but in vain. 'What do you mean to do?' I asked. 'To go at once. There's an English steamer in port now, the 'Duncan.' 'Yes, but she won't leave for a fortnight.' 'Yes, she will; she will be under weigh in six hours; she is coaling now.' I looked at him in utter stupefaction. 'Have you hired this steamer,' I asked. 'Yes, and had the captain refused it on hire, I should have bought it; and if that one had not been for sale, I would have found another.' 'But it will cost you an enormous sum,' said I. He shrugged his shoulders disdainfully. 'What of that!' he answered. 'I know too well what a man suffers on the Devil's Island to let Jean die there. Am I not rich?'

"He was indeed. Three or four times better off than myself. This I knew very well. At the beginning of this last year, he had told me that his net profits were two hundred thousand francs per annum. And your 'run,' I said, 'do you intend to give it up? Do you intend to sacrifice that

and the immense number of sheep you have?' 'What do I care,' he cried, and then pointing to his friend and tutor, he added: 'This gentleman understands my business; he will take care of it, and in return I will give him half the profits, which will amount this year to over two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Give me pen, ink, and paper, and we will draw up a contract.'

"His eager haste terrified me. 'At least,' I said, 'tell me your plans?' 'I have none,' was his reply. 'I shall decide on my way.' Nothing could detain him. However, just as he was leaving, he handed me a folded paper. 'Everything must be provided for,' he said. 'If you do not hear from me for a year, open this envelope, and you will find my will inside together with certain instructions.' A boat lay at the wharf. He entered it. I called out, 'good luck to you,' and ten minutes later the steamer was under weigh."

Raymond clapped his hand to his forehead. "This, then, is the meaning of the mysterious influence by which Jean got away from the island," he said.

"That is precisely what your brother says," answered the baron. And displeased by the interruption, he added: "Pray let me go on."

"And I," continued Jean, "attributed the cordial welcome of the good merchant at Cayenne entirely to my own merits. It was to my father that I owed these powerful protectors, these amateurs, who bought my smallest sketches with such avidity. I ought to have felt my father's hand in each friendly grasp which was extended to me. But why did he not reveal himself? How had he such astonishing courage, when I was so crushed with loneliness and despair as not to open his arms and cry out to me: 'I am your father, and I have come to your aid?' Answer me this, I said to Pécheira. But he would not answer; nothing could move him. 'Your questions trouble me,' he said, 'let me tell my story in my own way. Laurent, as I was saying, went off and I remained in a state of great anxiety. It was five months before I had a line from him. He wrote that his enemies were so powerful that it would be the height of folly to attack them, as it would simply be the old story of the earthen and the iron pot. Not wishing to be broken, he determined to defer his vengeance yet a little longer only asking that God might allow his enemies to live until that time should come. He had assisted you, Jean,' he said, but in such a way that you had no suspicion of the source of this aid. He added that, when I received this letter, he should already be far away from France, and that he should speedily follow his missive."

"Soon afterwards I received another note from Cayenne, containing only the words: 'Expect me by the next steamer.' And he arrived, and it was with the heartiest pleasure I grasped his hand. We had not been more than a quarter of an hour together when he realised the curiosity that tormented me. 'Ask me no questions,' he said, 'for friend Pécheira, I dare not tell the truth, and I should be compelled to lie, which would be a disgrace to you and to me. I will tell you all I can——' 'which, my dear boy,' so Pécheira continued, 'was precious little indeed.'

"He said that on his arrival in Paris he was startled by some news he learnt from his political friends. They told him how a man who like himself possessed some compromising political secrets, had been carried off one evening and shut up in a lunatic asylum. 'And,' said Laurent, 'the poor fellow ended by losing his reason, and all the while I was in France the fear of a similar disaster hung over me. Maybe my enemies believe me

to be dead, but I may be mistaken. It is possible they have never lost sight of me, but are only waiting for an occasion to punish me for my escape.' Laurent then went on to tell me what he had done for you, and how he had succeeded in placing you in a family at Cayenne, who would treat you as a son. All that he could do he had done, and he was comforted by finding that your health had not suffered from the climate.

"'And now,' he concluded, 'the first part of my task is completed. I have educated myself and I have made a fortune. I have my weapons at last and can begin the contest. Let the villains tremble! God, who has so visibly protected me, will assist me once more. It is no common personal revenge which will satisfy me. The fellows must be brought to justice. They shall be made to shed tears of blood for their crime before they die. I am going to dispose of my property here and return to France. The hour is propitious. The Imperial Government is not what it was. The surface presents the same aspect—nothing is modified—but the foundations have been sorely shaken—one more shock and the edifice crumbles, and I intend to assist with all my strength in achieving this end. Not that I hate this *régime*. This or another is all the same to me. But this *régime* protects my enemies, and I shall assist in overthrowing it, so that they may be crushed under the ruins!'

"From that day forth Laurent had but one idea—to turn all his property into gold—which in a new country like ours is always a delicate operation, for very little capital is lying idle. And in Laurent's case the undertaking was especially complicated for he was involved in large freshly started enterprises, all excellent in themselves and apparently prosperous, but not likely to yield results for months. For this he could not wait. He wanted money, and he said to me, 'I must have all I own in such a form that I can use it instantly.'

"Under such circumstances he was naturally bound to make great sacrifices, and he made them without hesitation. He had about eight thousand cattle on his run, and if time had been of no consequence, he could have obtained one million four hundred thousand francs for them. However, he sold them *en bloc* for nine hundred thousand francs. He sold his sheep, which were worth fifteen francs each, for eight, and the whole of them only brought in three hundred and fifty thousand francs. For his right to his run, for his buildings and fences, for a thousand cows and a hundred horses, he only obtained one hundred and sixty-five thousand francs, and that with a vast deal of trouble.

"I was sorry to see him throw away a fortune which had been accumulated with such labour—and sell in this style, what had cost him two millions for fourteen hundred and twenty-five thousand francs, for, with time, his run would have developed into one of the most important in all Australia. But he laughed at what he called my jeremiades. 'Haven't I more than twenty times as much as my wildest fancy ever pictured?' he asked. And thereupon he went on making new sacrifices. He sold all his stock in industrial enterprises—his interest in certain mines, which it is true, had momentarily fallen in value, but were certain to rise again, and naturally he disposed of these at a heavy loss, being anxious to finish with the matter, for he kept on repeating, 'I feel that I am losing time.'

"He had been back in Australia for ten months or so when, one evening he came to me and said with a sigh of relief: 'I have sold everything—I am free!' And brandishing an enormous pocket-book—one which he could manage, however, to carry on his person—he added: 'There's all my for-

ture, in bills of exchange on Vienna, London, and Paris.' 'And you are going?' I asked. 'On Monday next—four days hence,' he replied.

"I knew that this separation must be eternal, and I also trembled for him. He divined my thoughts, for he took my hand, and with a voice full of resolution, such as might have imparted courage to an arrant coward, he exclaimed: 'Let your mind be easy, old friend; for more than a year I have been maturing all my plans, and I have applied every ray of intelligence I possess to avoid the perils of the step I am now taking. I have carefully weighed all contingencies, and I am prepared for everything.' 'Your enemies are very powerful,' I urged. 'I know it,' he said, 'but what have I to fear from them? You say that it is probable that they know of my existence and keep me in view. I think I should have found this out if it were the case. Still, as it is possible, I now intend to send them off the track. I shall not take the mail steamer, but leave in an American clipper bound for Liverpool, but which calls at several ports between here and there. At one of these ports I shall leave it, and take passage in another vessel. After that my identity will be lost. I leave Australia under the name of Boutin, but no Boutin will land in America, France, or England.' So saying he tapped his big pocket-book: 'These are my weapons,' he added gaily 'Nothing is impossible to a man with plenty of money!' And he was right.

"I never asked him the precise amount of his fortune—nor did he ever tell me; but I knew that everything together it could not have been far from five millions. Instances of fortunes made with such rapidity are rare even in Melbourne, but I can mention twenty or so: Barclay, Tidal, Colt, Latour, and Davison, became millionaires in a shorter time even than Laurent Cornevin. He was not spoiled by prosperity. He never forgot that it was through me he had left Talcahuana. He remembered, too, that it was I who had been the source of his wealth. Brave, good Laurent! How many times, when he saw my affairs less prosperous than his own, had he come to me and said: 'Zounds! man let us go into partnership.'

"It was on a small estate that I own, on the shores of the Murray, that we passed the last four days of his sojourn in Australia together. It was very sweet for us both to look back on the past, to the strong friendship which had never been shaken, and to swear that we would meet again. At last the hour came for him to leave. He promised to send me news of himself, and told me how to send him intelligence of my own welfare from time to time. And once more, on board the clipper, we grasped each other's hands, and neither of us was ashamed that tears stood in our eyes. This was on January 10th, 1869——"

"A year ago," murmured Raymond, "and I——"

"Let me go on," said the baron.

"You alone, dear friends," continued Jean, "you alone can imagine how greatly I was disturbed by Pécheira's narrative. And so I said to myself, 'Just as I hoped to ascertain that I was close on my father's track, I have lost him. We might have crossed each other on mid-ocean. Perhaps I saw him on the deck of a vessel that passed mine under full sail. Where was he now?' When I asked this question of Pécheira, he said he knew nothing, for certain, save that Laurent Cornevin had arrived safely in Europe. 'You had news of him, then?' I asked. 'Yes, once—five months after his departure, that is to say at the end of May—I received a letter from him, dated from Brussels. His voyage had been remarkably rapid, and his health was excellent. He had destroyed his track behind and his hopes

were high.' 'He said that?' 'Yes; I will show you the letter.' 'And since then?' 'Nothing—not one word. But were I in your place I should look for your father in Paris, not far from the *Chausée d'Antin*.'

"Now then, my friends, my task is over; yours is to begin. It is for you to finish my work—for you to decide what system of investigation shall be adopted in view of finding out my father. Only, my dear friends, be prudent. We know the infinite trouble my father has taken to attain his aims. Try to find him, but never forget that the least indiscretion on your part will arouse his enemies, reveal his existence, destroy all his hopes, and place his very life in peril.

"This is all the information I can give you: First, that according to my father's instructions, *Pécheira* addressed his letters to *F. Thompson, Esq., Charing Cross, District Post Office, London, W. C.* Secondly, *Pécheira* possessed a good photograph of our father, which I shall take to a photographer's and have copied to-day. I will send you one of the copies at once.

"Now, shall we communicate the result of my investigations to my mother and *Madame Delorge*? I think not. Why should we trouble their peaceful lives by loading them with our anxieties? Then, too, we can by no means feel certain that while we have been indulging in these illusions our enemies have not succeeded in suppressing my unfortunate father for the second time. Would it not be a most awful thing to open wounds, now partly healed? I have not another minute if this letter is to go to-day. So I only add the words—hope and courage.

"*JEAN CORNEVIN.*"

"And this is all!" said the baron, in a disappointed tone. Then, after a moment's silence, and as if enlightened by an inspiration, he exclaimed: "Now we have it! This is the meaning of *Maumussy's* humble and conciliatory attitude!"

"Impossible!"

"And why impossible? Who can say that *De Maumussy* and *Combelaine* have not penetrated the secret of your father's existence. May it not be that as long as they could watch him they felt at ease, but as soon as they lost all clue to him, they became frightened? The empire totters, their power escapes them, and it is precisely at this moment that they scent this mysterious danger."

The two friends then proceeded to read the letter from *M. Roberjot* which accompanied *Jean's*.

This was what the lawyer wrote: "You have a right to be hopeful, my dear *Raymond*, for it is clear to me that *Cornevin* is in Paris. But, in my opinion, to try and find him would be both foolish and unkind. We have no right to act contrary to his wishes. If this man, who loves his family so much, chooses to live apart from wife and children, it must be because he has powerful reasons for doing so. In my opinion, as in that of all sensible persons, dark days are close at hand. Wait! I say, wait!"

VIII.

WAIT! Had *Raymond* done anything else for years? No matter what projects he had formed, what hopes had crept into his heart, all were crushed by this advice. "It's killing me," he cried, "happy or miserable, other men fight and conquer, attack and defend themselves, triumph or perish in the effort while I——"

The baron interrupted him in a compassionate tone. "What would you do?" he asked

"What would I do. I don't know. Act at all events."

"You mean you would look for Cornevin?"

"Very possibly."

"That is to say, you would run the risk of compromising this worthy, noble man—this heroic fellow to whom your father confided his last wishes? That is to say, you would destroy the fruit of his ten years' patient toil."

"Why did Jean tell us to continue his task?"

"Because Jean is six thousand leagues from Paris, and does not know how near the finish may be."

Raymond rose, and began walking up and down the room in a state of great agitation. "The finish of it!" he exclaimed; "the finish! For years it has been promised me. I have been told that the hour was close at hand, and I have foolishly held my breath in momentary expectation."

The baron's face darkened. "Then," he said, "It is the mere desire for revenge upon your father's murderers which impels you to try and find Cornevin?"

"Of course."

"I fancied that Simone de Maillefert might count for something in your eagerness; I fancied that you were in haste to close the past so as to open the future, and that you hoped Cornevin would release you from the difficulties of your present position."

Raymond coloured. "I will follow your advice, sir," he replied. "What ought I to do? Speak, and I will obey!"

The old engineer smiled. "I shall make you very angry," he answered, "for I shall repeat just what you have so often heard. You must be patient."

"Yes, but Simone's peril is imminent."

"I know that, but you have so far done everything in your power. And by making a formal application for her hand you have silenced the vile slander which was in circulation."

"But her mother will devise some new combination."

"That is only too likely. But at the same time that is all the more reason why you should wait to see your adversary's cards. Ah! why were you not skilful enough to interest that beautiful young duchess in your game?"

Raymond had repelled this idea with horror when it had occurred to him. "Would it have been possible?" he asked.

"Possible! Nothing was easier—with a little skill and audacity. She held her hand out to you, my dear boy. To behave as I suggest would not have been very chivalrous, nor even quite loyal, but it would have been adroit. And after all her conduct has been most equivocal. But the opportunity is lost and cannot return." Then rising abruptly, the baron exclaimed "The government certainly does not pay us for smoothing your suit with Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and we must get to bed or we shall not be able to do anything to-morrow!" And refusing to listen to another word from Raymond, he added: "Good-night, good-night—sleep well."

This was capital advice to give, but long after the baron was sleeping soundly Raymond was still restlessly pacing his apartment, recapitulating in his mind the decisive events of the day. This day, the anniversary of his father's death, had begun by his interview with the Duchess de Maillefert and had ended by the letter from Jean Cornevin. What most disturbed him

was that he could not sufficiently detach his thoughts from Simone to reflect upon the fate of Laurent. "Heaven grant," he said in an undertone, "that to-day's step will have the result predicted by the baron."

On this point he was enlightened the next day in the public room of the Rising Sun. Master Bérú knew the whole matter; that was clear from the attention he bestowed on Raymond, and by the sympathetic tone of his voice. After a short time, he carelessly mentioned that ever since the duchess's arrival, the young lady had been raising money all over the province—that she was asking for advances from her tenants—that she had borrowed from the notaries at Angers—that she was stripping herself, and would end by being left without a sou. And then, with a knowing glance at Raymond, he added: "It is said that the Duchess does not wish her daughter to marry, and that she has said the most awful things about her to prevent any one from asking for her hand. A husband would defend the poor thing."

"What did I tell you?" muttered the baron in Raymond's ears, as he rubbed his hands gleefully.

But Master Bérú also knew other things of which the two engineers were quite ignorant. "She has borrowed everywhere," he said, "and now she is going to sell."

"Do you really think that?" interrupted M. de Boursonne.

The worthy innkeeper looked about him to be certain that no one could hear, and then, with a mysterious air, he said: "Some people know more than you think!"

"I dare say; but what do they know?"

"Well, sir, when you see crows flying about and massing together, what do you fancy? Why, that there is something for them to peck at—some carcass. This is the way folks are gathering about poor Mademoiselle Simone's property."

"What folks?" cried the two engineers at the same moment.

"First, one of those gentlemen who came to the château the other evening—the stout, rosy-faced man with the big gold chain, who looks at people in a lofty way, as if he were seated up among the clouds."

"M. Verdale!" muttered Raymond.

"But what has he done?" asked the baron.

"Nothing personally. But yesterday he came to Rosiers in a carriage. He went to the café, and there he met a certain man from Saint-Mathurin, who was once employed by Mademoiselle Simone on the estate. The pair then proceeded to a notary's—not to mademoiselle's notary, you understand—and then to the tax-collector's office, where they were joined by an old *huissier*."

The baron smiled lightly. "Is that all?" he asked, with feigned indifference.

"Ah! wait a minute. They all went over the De Maillefert property—very carefully, too, as if they were going to purchase. And then I heard the stout man say: 'It is worth a good deal of money, certainly, but not as much as you think.'"

This was all the innkeeper had to tell, but it was not without its importance, and as soon as he had withdrawn, the baron exclaimed: "Now we arrive at the real reason which has brought these gentlemen to the château. The duchess has discovered some way of getting hold of her daughter's fortune, and they have come here to commence operations. They feel so sure of success that they are already dividing the poor child's property."

"But she has sworn never to sell any of the land."

"Unquestionably; but these men are here to compel her to break this oath of her's."

There lay the danger, evidently; and Raymond and the baron were busily engaged in discussing it when a tilbury appeared in sight, driven by fascinating M. Bizet de Chenehutte in person. He jumped out and darted towards Raymond with extended hands, at the same time declaring that he had been looking for him everywhere. For he knew everything, he said, absolutely everything—both what Raymond had done and the answer he had received. Madame de Larchère had told him and everybody else about the duchess's abominable conduct in trying to disgrace her own child. "But she has only succeeded in disgracing herself," added Bizet. "The whole province has turned against her, and I honestly believe she would be hissed if she were to show herself at Saumur or Angers. Every door would be shut against her, and so she had better return to Paris with all possible speed. I must really go, gentlemen," he continued. "I have at least twenty visits to pay. I intend to spread this intelligence; but if I get through in season I shall come and ask you to give me some dinner." And then off he went.

"Nice young man," muttered the baron; "a most merciful Providence has ordained that fools have their uses in this world. And this one is doing us a service that no sensible man would dream of. If he comes to-night I shall take the greatest pleasure in offering him a good glass of wine."

But Bizet did not appear again. The old gardener from the château came, however, about nine o'clock to the Rising Sun with a letter for Raymond from Simone.

The young fellow poured all the silver in his pocket into the gardener's hand, and then tore open the letter which ran as follows:—"Things have gone better since you left than I ventured to hope. No one would imagine that anything had happened. My mother behaves to me exactly as she did before that horrible scene. I am certain, from some orders I heard her give her maid, that she will leave Maillefert to-morrow. SIMONE."

The next morning, when the two engineers were on the point of sitting down to breakfast, a great noise called them to the window just in time to see several carriages dash by. Master Béru came in at the same moment. "Well! well!" he said. "Madame de Maillefert is off with all her friends. Good riddance to them!"

The baron triumphed. "What did I tell you!" he cried.

And in truth this departure was so like a complete rout, that it was difficult to attribute it to anything else but the step taken by Raymond, which was known, commented upon, and understood by all the people round about.

But Raymond did not dare to triumph. He had known too much disappointment and sorrow not to be very distrustful of good fortune. He felt that it would be the height of madness to conclude from the duchess's abrupt departure that she had renounced her designs on her daughter's fortune. It was clear that her needs were as pressing, her avarice as imperative as ever, and Simone's position was consequently quite as hazardous. Ah! if Madame de Maillefert's departure had only opened the château door to Raymond once more. But this could not be. By returning to Maillefert he would simply provoke a revival of the scandal, and rehabilitate the unworthy mother at her daughter's expense. And so having to comply with the proprieties which were even more than exacting than the duchess's will, he found himself separated from Simone. "I shall not even try to see her," he said, sadly.

And in justice to him, we must say that he did not; but a happy chance

brought them together. Simone was out a great deal; Raymond was rarely indoors; and it came to pass that the very next day they stood face to face on the highway near the bridge. They both stood still, silent and hesitating. Both heard the voice of reason bid them hurry past each other. But in spite of all the efforts of Miss Dodge, they stood with clasped hands, while Simone hurriedly told Raymond what, in her opinion, had sent her mother off. The duchess had called on a lady of the highest position—one of her relatives, in fact—who had come to the top of the stairs, and said, aloud, in the hearing of all her servants: "Excuse me, I am not at home to the mother of my poor little Simone."

The insult was excessive, and all the more so coming from such a source. "And the worst of it is," added the young girl, sadly, "that my mother holds you, that is to say, us, responsible for the affront. She will never forgive us!"

Simone had not the smallest idea what new plan her mother had in her head. And when Raymond told her he believed that De Combelaïne and Maumussy had come down respecting her property, she merely gave him a dreary smile and said, "This is not the first time that my brother and mother have brought people down to inspect my property. But what does that matter—as I am not going to sell it?"

Raymond and Simone were not together for ten minutes, and not a human being passed them as they stood together. And yet such was the system of espionage in this little town of Rosiers, that two hours later, when Raymond entered the Rising Sun, the baron at once cried out to him: "So you have seen Simone?"

"Yes," the young man answered, with a flush.

"A mistake—a great mistake," said the worthy old engineer. "But I suppose it will do no especial harm," he added, "as we must so soon go away."

Their work had gradually advanced, and before many days elapsed they would have to shift their head-quarters. The baron had deferred doing so as long as possible, knowing what a blow it would be to Raymond. "Yes," he continued, "you have but four days more before we start, so make the most of them."

Raymond had determined that, come what might, his Sundays should be spent at Rosiers for some time to come, so he bore up bravely on the last evening they were to spend at the Rising Sun. That very same evening the baron received a letter enclosed in a huge envelope with official seals. "What have we here?" he asked, as he broke the seals; and scanning the missive, "Merciful God!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean?"

Raymond's heart contracted with a sharp pang of apprehension. "What is it?" he asked.

The baron was pale with rage. "It is this," he said, "that you are no longer on my staff. You are sent to the Department of the Bouches-du-Rhône. You are allowed eight days to get there, and your commission will arrive to-morrow!"

Raymond stood as if turned to stone. "It isn't possible," he stammered. "Some one has complained of me. How have I failed in my duty?"

The baron shrugged his shoulders. "I am your *chef*," he said, "and I have always shown you the letters I have sent to the authorities, so——"

By this time Raymond had recovered from his astonishment, and anger had asserted its sway, "In that case," he remarked, "I am the victim of an exceptional measure."

"Ah ! Madame de Maumussy warned you—," began the baron.

"True—I have enemies, and powerful ones. But this is not 1852; it is 1869. The press has regained its right to speak. I can write to the newspapers and expose this abominable conduct."

With a gesture the baron silenced him. "I am sorry for it," he said, "but even this satisfaction will be denied to you. You are shamefully treated. Of that there is no question, for it is against all precedent. But, one thing is certain. Read the letter again and you will see that your change of position is in reality promotion."

This was true. This precaution at least had been taken. "I am inclined to believe that the authorities are perfectly innocent in the matter. Do you think that any one went to them and said : 'Look here ! There's a fellow at Rosiers, in the Department of Maine-et-Loire, who is in our way. Send him off, will you ? Send him to the Bouches-du-Rhône, for instance.' No, indeed ; your enemies are not quite so simple. They said : 'He is a very charming young man, in whom we are all deeply interested, and we should be infinitely obliged if you would give him a position in the South, where he has certain interests.' And so the authorities thought they were doing you a favour."

"That is to say," cried Raymond, striking the table with his clenched fist, "that I, the son of General Delorge, have been put in the light of soliciting a favour from the empire. That is to say that I am dishonoured for ever ! No, it shall not be ! The wretches shall not have everything their own way. I shall resign. Yes, and this very moment !"

More saddened than surprised the baron watched Raymond as he took his seat at the desk and prepared to write. "Reflect, my dear Delorge," he said, gently. "When your resignation is dispatched, what will you do ?"

"I neither know nor care."

"Take care. A man should be able to offer a home to the woman he loves—"

"I shall always find something to do." And the young fellow folded his letter and began to direct it.

"And your mother ?" asked the baron.

Raymond turned a little pale, but he did not lay down his pen. "Poor woman !" he muttered, "if she only knew— But I do not belong to myself. I seem the very foot-ball of fate—my destiny must be accomplished."

"Do you mean to remain at Rosiers ?" asked the baron.

"Yes ; I do indeed."

"And what will be said here when it becomes known that you have resigned such a position to linger at the side of the heiress of Maillefert ? Do you think her reputation won't suffer ? In your place I should ask her opinion before deciding."

But Raymond had had enough of uncertainty and perplexity—of perpetual indecisions and wearying alternations of hope and despair. "No," he said ; "I will not consult her. She would tell me to yield—she would tell me to obey my orders and go." Thereupon, with a firm hand he signed the resignation he had written—a resignation from which there was no possibility of appeal.

"Who would ever have believed, my dear Delorge," said the baron, "that I should finish this work, which will be the success of my life, without you ?"

The evening that they passed together was not demonstratively sad, for

they both struggled to display a stoicism they were really far from feeling. However, the next morning the baron fairly broke down as he bade his young friend farewell. "You must come and pay me a visit," he said; "and above all don't commit any folly. If I can serve you, if you need me, you have only to write and say so."

The train puffed off, and Raymond stood gazing at the trailing smoke. A tap on his shoulder at last aroused him from his sad thoughts. It was Bérú who was guilty of this familiarity—Master Bérú, who had just said good-bye to the baron on the platform, and who now remarked to Raymond: "Let us go home."

"Home!" It was without the least afterthought that the innkeeper spoke this word. However, after celebrating the merits of the baron, and thanking God that one of his customers was still left, he exclaimed: "But is it true, sir, that you are no longer an engineer?"

Raymond turned round quickly.

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Because—because I heard some of the workmen say yesterday that you had sent in your resignation," replied Master Bérú, much embarrassed—the fact is, he had listened to Raymond and the baron. "People are talking about it in the town. I declared, though, that it must be a joke."

It was hardly worth while for Raymond to make a mystery of what must soon be known, and so he quietly answered: "No, it was not a joke."

"Ah!" said Master Bérú, with a knowing wink—"ah! I understand."

Master Bérú gave Raymond the exact idea of what would be thought respecting his prolonged sojourn at Rosiers. A hundred other people would say "I understand," just as he had done. And there is no worse public to face than that of a little country town when its curiosity is aroused.

"Now I will consult Simone," thought Raymond to himself.

He had met her before on the highroad, and he repaired again to the same spot, which was not far from the old château. The weather had been glorious for a couple of days; the sky was clear and frosty; and the pale December sun shone on the denuded branches covered with hoar frost. With his face exposed to the north wind, Raymond stood under a spreading oak and waited. From this point of vantage he could contemplate one of the most beautiful landscapes along the Loire—a landscape of which the greater part belonged to Mademoiselle de Maillefert. Her's was all that spreading meadow-land—her's those forests and vineyards on the sunny hillsides. And he thought sadly enough that it was this immense fortune which raised such a barrier between himself and Simone. Ah! would that she were only poor like those peasant girls, who, with their faces purple with the cold, trudged past him as they returned from the market at Trèves, with their baskets on their hips and their wooden shoes striking the frozen earth like hammers! "Then," thought Raymond, "no one could dispute my love for her."

But time was passing, and he had become very uneasy, when all at once he perceived two women coming rapidly in his direction. He recognized Simone, in a large brown cloak, and Miss Dodge, the English governess, swathed in furs, with her hands buried in her muff. "At last," he muttered.

But almost immediately a terrible fear assailed him. Suppose Simone should be so astonished by his audacity as to reject the protection which he wished to afford her, this being his motive for remaining at Rosiers; and suppose she bade him go away? What could he do in that case?

Mademoiselle Simone and Miss Lydia were still quietly approaching the

spot where he was stationed, partially concealed by the drooping branches. All at once he stepped forward. "Good heavens!" cries the governess, who did not know this man for a moment, so suddenly did he appear. But Simone knew him, and went straight to meet him, exclaiming in a strange unusual tone—"You have allowed the Baron de Boursonne to go away alone? You have sent in your resignation?"

"Yes; I have done both these things."

Never did Simone and Raymond meet without an earnest protest from Miss Dodge, who declared these meetings to be most improper. However the young girl checked her governess on this occasion. "One moment if you please," she said. "That will do, thank you, Lydia." And addressing Raymond, she remarked: "I thought your position was all you had to rely upon."

"And you were right, I am sorry to say. My mother has some little means, but these are for herself and my sister."

Simone coloured, and looking at Raymond as if all at once a startling suspicion had assailed her, she asked: "But what do you mean to do?"

Raymond, too, turned crimson. He shuddered at the idea that Simone would imagine him capable of such shameless calculation. "Modest as my resources are," he answered, "they must suffice for the present, and before they are exhausted fate will perhaps look more kindly upon me. There is nothing to alarm me in the future."

The young girl's suspicions vanished as she looked into his eyes. "But I cannot accept such a sacrifice!" she said.

This phrase was Raymond's reward. "Why do you speak of sacrifices?" he exclaimed. "There was no time to consult with you—no time for hesitation. Our enemies wished to send me away; and so it was clearly my duty to remain."

While these words were being exchanged the poor governess had been shivering among her furs, and her nose stood out redder and redder on her long pale face. "Do let us walk on!" she said to Simone.

"Very well," answered the girl. And as they followed the road, she said to Raymond: "Do you intend to remain at Rosiers?"

He shook his head. "I have decided on nothing yet," he answered in an agitated voice. "I came to consult you. Dispose of me. Your will is mine. I will obey your orders without a murmur. My sojourn at Rosiers may be wrongly interpreted."

"It will be, certainly," sighed Miss Lydia.

Mademoiselle Simone stopped short. "Alas!" she said sadly. "Has not injury enough been already done to my reputation. A young girl's honour withers like a flower under the hot blast of calumny." Then, as if determined not to yield to her emotion, she suddenly exclaimed: "I must have time for reflection. To-morrow, Monsieur Raymond, at the same hour—here."

And taking the arm of her governess, she drew her into a little path which led through the wood towards the château.

The next day, some little time before the appointed hour, Raymond betook himself with a feverish step to the place of meeting, inventing a thousand plans and turning them over in his head—adopting and then rejecting them one after the other. The clock in the church tower struck two, and Simone appeared, accompanied by Miss Dodge, as on the previous afternoon. In three bounds Raymond stood beside her, as breathless with anxiety as if he expected a sentence of life or death.

As soon as Simone's eyes met his, she shook her head gently, and said, with a sad smile: "I am no nearer a decision than I was yesterday. I am not like myself. I feel weak, irresolute, and I cannot make up my mind."

"Then I am not to go away!" cried Raymond.

"Sometimes," answered the girl, in her clear, sweet voice, "I am almost frightened; I shiver without knowing why, and yet I cannot see any tangible ground for fears. My mother took a considerable sum away with her, and until that is exhausted I shall, no doubt, be at peace. My mother is not wicked, nor is Philippe. Their hearts are not bad; it is their heads that are weak."

Raymond was astonished at so much indulgence, not understanding that Simone urged these extenuating circumstances for herself as well as for him. "Alas!" he said, "it is not Madame de Maillefert nor your brother whom I fear; I distrust M. de Maumussy, De Combelaine, and Verdale. Why did they come here?" He hesitated for a moment, coloured slightly, and then added, "I am afraid, too, of Madame de Maumussy. Half a dozen times words have trembled on her lips which I am convinced were the avowal of some abominable treason—some treason against you in which she plays her part."

Simone did not lose her beautiful serenity. "What can they do against me?" she asked. And then after a moment's hesitation she added, "If this be your idea, perhaps, you had better stay."

But Miss Lydia Dodge had also reflected, and she curtailed Raymond's expressions of gratitude. "Why not try some conciliatory method? A little prudent management never spoils anything. This gentleman might seem to go away, and yet remain. He could go, in fact, and then return and establish himself in some neighboring farm-house, and only go out in the evening."

Simone's beautiful face flushed. "Hide! and lie? No, never! It is not in that way one can release oneself from a false position. We will not transform a misfortune into a disgrace. If Raymond stays, he must stay openly, acknowledging with equal openness that he stays for me. My reputation would suffer perhaps, but in an infinitely less degree. Raymond has a right to shield me and my reputation, for if I am not his wife I shall never marry!"

Never was a person so thunderstruck as Miss Dodge by Simone's sudden vehemence. This fashion of facing the situation absolutely routed what she called her ideas. Her tall, bony frame—her thin lips and long, yellow teeth—her pale face, red nose, and round eyes did not make her a prepossessing being; but, despite her physical presentment, the worthy governess, to her own detriment, possessed a very sensitive nature and a most vivid and romantic imagination. She was the seventh daughter of a poor Protestant clergyman having an incumbency in the neighbourhood of London, and she had spent her youth in waiting, like the princesses in fairy tales, for the young and handsome hero who would realize her dreams. He never came, but poverty did. The clergyman died, his numerous family were scattered, and Miss Lydia was compelled to accept a situation as a governess. The trial had been a great one for her, and it was not without a fearful struggle that she buried all her illusions in the depths of her soul as in a tomb. Since then many years had passed by in silent resignation; but under her cold, rigid demeanour as a governess, there was still a warm heart beating. In the evening, when she was alone in her bedroom, she bolted her door and made up for all the annoyance of the day by plunging

eagerly into novel-reading. She devoured everything she could lay hands on, weeping hot tears over the persecuted and innocent heroines, and shivering with emotion as she read of the gallant deeds achieved by the heroes. She fancied that she had acquired from these nocturnal studies a thorough knowledge of the world, life, and passion, and above all she believed she had stored her mind with all sorts of valuable expedients, and was thus always ready to meet any emergency. - It was thus, the most natural thing in the world for her to be deeply interested in Raymond and Simone's love. She said all sorts of reasonable things to them, for she considered that a part of her duty as a governess; but, in the depths of her heart, she was their devoted accomplice, thinking at the same time, that they were foolish children, and that if she had been in their place she would soon have found a way out of the dilemma in which they were involved.

However Raymond agreed with Simone. "No, no," he replied; "we have nothing to conceal. Dissimulation would dishonour our love."

"And besides," added Simone, "this will only last a little while. I shall find some way of winning my mother over, and bringing my duty and my wishes into harmony."

The day was drawing to a close and reminded of this by Miss Lydia, the young people reluctantly separated, but not without promising to see each other again at the same time and place.

The next week they were several times seen and met by people on the high road. "It was certainly very odd!" according to M. Bizet de Chenehutte; and many people declared it was somewhat too bold; while others of Madame de Maillefert's circle smiled, and said: "This young Delorge is really too good. Were I in his place I should make short work of the matter, and run off with the young lady."

All these cheerful remarks were at once reported to Raymond by M. Bizet, who having constituted himself his agent and advocate, ran about the country gathering up all he could for or against him, and forming public opinion, as he loftily remarked.

Simone and Raymond cared but little for all this gossip. Overjoyed by the peace so unexpectedly granted them by this respite of even a few weeks' duration, they hastened to take advantage of it, forgetting in the joy of the present both the storms of the past and the clouds of the future. And by degrees, at the end of the week, they quite forgot themselves, and spent nearly all their time together, although always accompanied by Miss Lydia. One day Raymond offered Simone his arm as they walked along the road overlooking the Loire, followed by the governess. The next day the weather was atrocious; it was impossible for Simone to walk about, and so Raymond sent to ask if she would not come to the ruins of the old château. "Why not receive Monsieur Delorge here, in the new château?" objected Miss Lydia.

This would have been far wiser, only Raymond and Simone did not think so. As long as the rain lasted, they spent their afternoons among the ruins, where there was a large arched hall, in which all sorts of *débris* had been accumulated. It was here that the lovers met. Once when Simone's feet were wet, Raymond went off and collected an armful of dry wood, with which he lighted a fire in the big chimney. "How delightful!" cried the girl. "I wish we always had one!" and these simple words were as an order to Raymond, so that when Simone arrived at the ruins the next day there was a bright fire already crackling and roaring up the chimney.

Raymond never received any letters from Paris, and he never opened a newspaper. He heard that affairs were going badly—that the empire was

hesitating between a liberal ministry and a new *coup d'état*. But what did this matter to him? All he thought of was of persuading Simone to purchase her mother's sanction to the marriage, by abandoning part of her fortune. She had rejected the plan when he first unfolded it; but, by degrees, she listened more patiently, her firm will shaken by the calm and gentle life they now led.

One day in December they were sitting close by the fire talking, and Miss Lydia was reading a little apart, when all at once they heard some stones rolling, and quick steps approaching through the ruins. "Who is that?" cried Raymond, starting up. But before he had time to go and ascertain, M. Bizet de Chenehutte appeared before him. "May I ask—" began Raymond, haughtily, thinking that Bizet's curiosity had brought him there. But the young provincial gave him no time to proceed, "Monsieur Philippe! the Duke!" he cried. "Take care. He arrived an hour ago, and he is close at my heels now."

Simone rose to her feet. "My brother!" she gasped.

"Yes, your brother," answered a mocking voice. And M. Philippe stepped upon the scene, looking just as usual. He put his glass to his eye, and took in each detail of the strange scene—Miss Lydia crouching on a broken column, with her book open on her knees, Simone leaning against the chimney, Bizet, red and out of breath, and finally, Raymond, who stood with head erect and defiant eyes. "A most singular place really to meet a lover," drawled the duke, "particularly when one possesses the most beautiful château in all Anjou!" Then, turning to Simone, he added; "I am by no means without pity for the faults of others, dear sister. We all have our weaknesses——"

"Not another word!" interrupted Raymond, fiercely.

The duke mechanically started back. "Ah! a duel," he said.

But Raymond snatched up a heavy branch of oak and went towards him. "No—not a duel!" he answered, in a hoarse voice. "But if any man that breathes is wanting in respect to this lady, I will kill him like a dog."

Philippe believed him. "You are mistaken, my dear Delorge. My sister is quite old enough to know what she is about; and I myself need far too much indulgence to have any right to be severe towards her. If I have disturbed you, it is simply because I came down from Paris to see Simone respecting a matter which involves the honour of our house. On inquiring for her, I was told that I should find her here."

It was clear that something fresh was a-foot. His conciliatory words and deferential manner proved this conclusively. "Will you go with me to the château, Simone?" he asked.

His sister slowly moved to his side.

"Mademoiselle!" implored Raymond, following her.

"Excuse me," said the duke; "you are not as yet one of the family, and we have some dirty linen to wash." And he drew Simone along, followed by Miss Lydia, who trembled at each step.

"Well! well!" exclaimed Bizet, and then he continued: "It is perfectly evident, my dear Delorge, that the duke has had some spies down here. He came straight to this spot, and never spoke to a human being on his way."

But Raymond paid no attention to what his companion said. "What on earth does the young duke want?" he muttered. "What sinister intrigue is on foot now?"

Bizet, who was by no means a bad-hearted fellow, had the greatest difficulty in getting him back to Rosiers and into his own room. And not being

the person to abandon a friend in trouble, the young squire took a seat near the window at the Rising Sun. Suddenly he uttered an exclamation. He had just seen Philippe driving rapidly towards the station. He had come by the noon express and left by the four o'clock train.

"I must know what has happened!" cried Raymond. And springing up, he dashed down the stairs and hurried off to Maillefert.

He found the doors wide open. He entered and called, and heard no answer. With a terrible fear at his heart, he hastened up the staircase. In the small blue drawing-room which was lighted by one solitary candle, Simone was lying on a sofa—looking so pale, so frightfully changed, that he thought her dead at first. But she was alive, and she opened her eyes when he spoke to her, but would only say, "For pity's sake, leave me. To-morrow! to-morrow!"

He hesitated at first and then, as she repeated her request, he went away with death in his heart. He had never before endured such intolerable anguish. By noon on the following day he had heard nothing, and he was on the point of starting for the château, when Bérus entered the room with a letter.

With a sick feeling of apprehension, Raymond broke the seal and read as follows: "When you receive these lines I shall have left Maillefert for ever. Honour itself is lost. If you love me, I implore you, in the name of that love, not to try to find me. I am the most miserable of women. Farewell, my only friend, farewell."

Raymond tottered and caught at the wall. "While we slept, the others watched!" he muttered. "Blind fools that we have been!" Then all at once he exclaimed, "This is Maumussey's and Combelaïne's plot. They have stolen Simone from me. Ah! the wretches! God punishes me for having forgotten my duty to my father."

That evening he was on his way to Paris.

Part V.

THE RACE FOR MILLIONS

I.

It was on Wednesday, December 29th, 1869, that Raymond Delorge reached the capital. What he meant to do—what his hopes were—he would have found it difficult to say. Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert had been taken to Paris, and he had followed, ready for anything. But the journey—one of some ten hours' duration—had considerably cooled him down, and he had regained much of his usual *sang-froid*.

The clock was striking nine when he rang at his mother's door "it is Master Raymond," cried old Krauss, as he opened it. For the faithful trooper was still in the service of Madame Delorge, and years seemed to have left the strength and vigour of his wiry form undiminished.

"My brother!" cried a sweet youthful voice, and Pauline flew down the stairs. She was a great beauty, tall and fair, with chestnut hair, bright intelligent eyes and smiling lips. After giving her brother a dozen energetic hugs and as many kisses, she exclaimed: "You came just in time, for Ducoudray has sent us some delicious oysters from Marennes."

But she was interrupted by Madame Delorge who, recognizing her son's voice, now hurried down stairs in her turn. "How glad I am to see you, my dear son," she said, in a trembling voice; and, after kissing him, she drew him into the drawing-room, so as to look at him in a better light.

The room was just as Raymond had left it. His father's portrait faced him as he entered, and the sealed sword worn by the general on the day of his death still hung across the canvas. "So you decided, then, to come and pass the holidays with your mother and sister?" said the widow, while Pauline clapped her hands joyously.

But Raymond slowly answered, "I have come for longer than that, I fancy—for I have resigned."

"Resigned your position!" cried his mother. "And why?"

Raymond hesitated. The words he uttered now would have, as he well knew, a most decisive effect on his future. Why should he not tell his mother the entire truth? Was he not certain of her sympathy? However courage failed him. He knew the pain he would cause her, and he was quite as much afraid of tears as reproaches. "I was not willing to submit to an arbitrary measure of the authorities," he said, "a measure which was exceptionally unjust."

His mother's eyes flashed. "I knew it would come to this," she said; "I always expected it. I have been astonished that you were allowed to follow your career in peace without being interfered with, like poor Jean and Léon."

Raymond rejoiced at the interpretation his mother put on his words, for no further explanation on his part was necessary. It was clear that his supposed wrongs only fanned the flame of his mother's hatred. "They don't intend to let us forget them," she said bitterly. And extending her hand toward her husband's portrait, she added: "Do they indeed think it possible for us to forget?"

Raymond undoubtedly hated his father's cowardly murderers with a mortal hatred, and, at the same time, he abhorred Messrs. de Maumussy and de Combelaïne for being, as he judged, the accomplices of the Duchess de Maillefert. "No, I have not forgotten them, mother," he replied, "and the wretches shall make amends sooner or later for all that they have made me endure!"

Never had Madame Delorge heard her son speak in such tones of concentrated rage. She snatched his hands in hers and held them in a firm grasp. "You have spoken well, my dear boy! At times I have thought you pre-occupied, and indifferent to our interests, possibly. I doubted, I must confess, not your courage, but your perseverance; and I trembled lest I should see you turn from the path leading to what should be the sole aim of our existence. I was mistaken, and I beg your pardon."

Raymond turned away, ashamed to have deceived his mother, and to be obliged to listen to her praise which he knew he was unworthy of.

"You are free," continued Madame Delorge—"so much the better. You will see M. Roberjot to-day, and you will learn from him, better than from me, that the hour we have been waiting for is near at hand."

She stopped speaking, for at this moment the door of the drawing-room opened and in walked M. Ducoudray who had come to eat the oysters which he had sent the previous evening. The worthy man was not far from eighty, and yet no one would have suspected it, so straight was his figure and alert his step. Mentally and morally he was precisely the same as when we met him in 1852—a thorough Parisian *bourgeois*—a carper and jester. Skeptical and credulous at one and the same time; adventurous, yet timid—always ready to help on a revolution, and equally ready to hide in a cellar, when once the revolution came. "Upon my life!" he exclaimed, "here is our engineer!" and, after shaking hands with Raymond vigorously, so as to show that his manly strength was unimpaired, he began to tell all he had been doing since he rose that morning at seven o'clock.

Krauss came to say that breakfast was on the table; but nothing stopped the old gentleman when he was once fairly started. He continued to talk and mentioned that on his way to the Rue de Douai, he had dropped in at Madame Cornevin's where he had admired a truly royal *trousseau* she had prepared for the daughter of one of those great Russian noblemen, whose fabulous wealth reminds one of the "Arabian Nights." According to the old gentleman's story, Madame Cornevin would make a very large profit on this one *trousseau* alone, and he went on so say that she had accumulated a handsome fortune, of which he could speak with authority, as he managed all her investments.

However although she was now rich, she was still prudent and economical, and rarely partook of any recreation, save a Sunday walk, after which she usually dined with Madame Delorge. Madame Cornevin had never ceased to lament her husband: she talked of him incessantly. In vain did Ducoudray tell her that Laurent must have been dead for years—she had never entirely abandoned the hope of seeing him again. As Raymond listened he saw that the secret of Jean's letters had been well guarded, and that no one suspected that Cornevin was, at that very moment, in Paris.

After this mention of Madame Cornevin's affairs, garrulous M. Ducoudray proceeded to pass all the interesting Parisian news in review. First, the Princess d'Eljonsen was about to give a superb *fête* at her grand mansion in the Champs Elysées and the newspapers were already full of particulars. Then the Duke de Maumussy was selling several of his race-horses, not

because he was ruined, but because he had too many; and a passion for pictures, curiosities, and china, had followed his taste for the turf. Next, for the twentieth time, no doubt, there was a report of M. de Combelaïne's marriage to Madame Flora Misri; but this time it was true, at least, so Ducoudray said. After all these *can-cans* came particulars respecting Tropicmann, the assassin—the wild beast with a human face—whose trial had just begun.

Each word spoken by Ducoudray ought to have been full of meaning for Raymond, who had just spent a couple of months without once looking at the newspapers. What the worthy old gentleman said was to be sure the mere echo of the Boulevard; but it showed what people thought of all the men whom he was burning to attack. However the truth was, his thoughts were elsewhere—he hardly heard what was said. He was seated between his mother and sister, and it was a miracle that neither of them noticed that he ate nothing, and could barely play with his knife and fork. All that Madame Delorge remarked was that he was very pale. "Are you ill, Raymond?" she asked. But he protested that he had never been better in his life; and, when breakfast was over, he left the room, saying he would dress and then go and see M. Roberjot. However Pauline had been more observant than her brother supposed, and hardly had he entered his room than she was by his side, and, with her arm round his neck, softly asked him: "What is the matter, dear brother?"

He started. "What should be the matter?" he replied, with a forced smile. "I am only a little tired."

She shook her head. "I know better," she answered, petulantly. "That is what you said to mamma, and she believed you, but I watched you all through breakfast. Your body was with you, but your mind was far away."

Raymond kissed his sister. "Dear little spy!" he said, with an attempt at gaiety.

"But that is no answer," she sighed.

"What do you wish me to say?"

"I wish to know why you are so harassed,—why, you look ten years older than you did when you went away!"

"I suppose it is because I am anxious about my future, having sent in my resignation."

"I wish I could believe you," she answered. "In your eyes I am still a little girl, no doubt. But when you have been at home a little while you will see that I can keep a secret." And so saying she went out.

"Poor little Pauline!" thought Raymond, "Simone and she would love each other like two sisters." But could he trust her? He had not even decided to confide everything that had happened to M. Roberjot—nor was he any nearer a decision when he went up the lawyer's staircase.

Roberjot had become quite a personage—a deputy and influential orator—but he had kept his simple home, and his one servant, who recognized Raymond as soon as he saw him, and at once opened the door of his master's room. Nothing was changed there. The same pictures hung on the walls, the same paper-weight secured what looked like the same notes and papers, on the same desk. Time had blackened the wood of the furniture, faded the curtains and wall-paper, but that was the only difference. However the lawyer himself was more changed than his surroundings. His hair, once so black, was now thickly sprinkled with gray, and ambition and politics had furrowed his brows with deep wrinkles. He was also much heavier; his

former *embonpoint* had resolved itself into obesity; his features had lost their delicacy of outline and his mouth had almost a sensual expression. Nothing was the same with him except his eyes, as keen and bright as ever, his sarcastic voice and graceful gestures.

"At last!" he exclaimed, as Raymond appeared. "I knew very well that you would think that it was worth your while to come here as soon as you knew how things were going."

"What things?"

The lawyer looked at him. "May I ask you where you come from?"

"From Rosiers, in Maine-et-Loire."

"Well! you can get the newspapers there, I presume?"

"I have not opened one for two months!"

The lawyer raised his arms to heaven as if he heard a blasphemy. "Car that be so?" he exclaimed; "then listen to me." And he proceeded to recapitulate certain events of a public character which had just taken place, and were of the greatest possible weight.

The very evening before a paragraph, which ran as follows, had appeared in the *Journal Officiel*: "The ministers have sent in their resignations, which have been accepted by the Emperor. They will remain, however, in charge of their respective departments until their successors are appointed." Then followed a letter from the Emperor himself, applying "with confidence to the patriotism" of M. Emile Ollivier, and intrusting him with the formation of a new cabinet.

M. Roberjot was radaint, and laughed aloud with delight. "So you see," he said, "the task of saving this threatened dynasty is imposed on Ollivier. Does he think he will succeed? Of course he does. But he will need more shoulders than his own to uphold an edifice which is cracking and crumbling on all sides. He will promise to move mountains—and we will give him two or three, even six months to make vain efforts, but what then? Remember what I say to you this 29th day of December, 1869. The Ollivier cabinet will be the last cabinet of the Second Empire."

Raymond listened to these words with an emotion which can be easily understood, for was not his own fate involved in political events? "And then?" he asked.

Roberjot snapped his fingers. "Then will come the hour of justice for those who have waited eighteen years. A simpleton like Barban d'Avranchel won't question De Combelaïne and De Maumussy then—no, the garden of the Elysée will be made to give up its secret."

"But it is Laurent Cornevin alone who knows that secret," said Raymond.

"And he will tell it!"

"Do you really believe him to be in Paris?"

The lawyer looked amazed. "But did you not read Jean's letter?" he cried.

"Of course I did."

"Was it not perfectly clear?"

Struck by Roberjot's certainty, Raymond at once agreed to the probability of Cornevin's presence in the capital, and this fact once admitted, he began to realize the precious assistance this man might afford him, thanks to his indomitable courage and energy. "Had we not better look for him?" he ventured to say. "We might use the greatest caution."

"Are you utterly mad?" cried the lawyer. "Would you put the police on his track? Would you denounce him and have him arrested? How do you know that he may not be at the head of one of the hundred revolutionary

movements which are now being projected? No, be careful not to interfere with him. Let him manage the matter as he chooses; he is certainly entitled to do that. You may be certain that he will appear when he is needed. What has been a question of years is now but a question of months, or even weeks perhaps."

How could Raymond listen without a pang to people who talked to him of months, weeks, and even days, when the very minutes which were slipping by so rapidly bore Simone's fate, happiness, and life, away on their wings!

He said no more, but his face became so gloomy that M. Roberjot was struck by it, and asked, in a tone of friendly anxiety: "What has gone wrong with you? I am your friend, as you well know. What is it?"

"I no longer belong to the government corps of engineers," said Raymond. "I have sent in my resignation."

Pauline, with her quick girlish instinct, had had a glimpse of the truth, but Roberjot took the same view of the matter as Madame Delorge had done. "They were troubling you, then?"

"They chose to change my quarters——"

The lawyer began laughing. "I suppose," he said, "that the son of some great personage wanted your place—that's a very simple explanation. But console yourself. There is a great card for you to play. When the empire falls you will have the most undisputed rights to advancement. And besides you find yourself at leisure at the right time, for we need men——"

He was interrupted by his servant, who appearing at the door, announced that he had just shown a visitor into the waiting-room. "And who is it?" asked the lawyer.

"Monsieur Verdale."

Roberjot's face changed. "What!" he exclaimed, raising his voice as if he hoped to be heard in the next room, "is my dear friend Baron Verdale there?"

"No, sir, not the baron; a young man."

"His son, possibly?"

"I don't know, sir."

Accustomed as Roberjot was to restraining all outward signs of emotion, he nevertheless, on this occasion clearly evinced his curiosity. "Well," he said to his servant, without seeming to remember Raymond's presence, "show the gentleman in."

A moment later the door communicating with the waiting-room opened, and a young man who looked about Raymond's age appeared.

"You are the son of Baron Verdale, sir?" asked Roberjot, abruptly.

If the visitor had answered no, he would have been believed, for there was nothing in his appearance at all suggestive of the architect. He was tall and slender of build and elegantly but very simply dressed. However, before he could reply, Roberjot continued, "And you come from the baron?"

The young man smiled faintly. "You know very well, sir, that my father has not the smallest right to the title of baron which is engraved on his visiting-card. It is a weakness of his, which, however, it is unbecoming for me to criticise——" He did not say so in words, but the gesture he now made clearly signified: "Spare me the worry of the title."

Then after a pause he added, "The fact is, sir, I come to you on my own account, not on my father's." He hesitated, for he had just seen Raymond, who had withdrawn on one side. "But you are not alone, sir. I fear I am intruding, as what I have to say will take some time."

Although Raymond was very pre-occupied he saw that his presence was

embarrassing to the young visitor. So he hastily exclaimed, "I am going," and then addressing the lawyer, added: "Now that I am once more in Paris I shall trouble you very often; but for this morning I bid you good-bye!"

II.

HARDLY a day elapses in this great city of Paris, where so many human interests centre, and so many human passions ferment, without one meeting some unhappy-looking person who paces the sidewalk in a somnambulist fashion, talking to himself. Much in this style did Raymond walk along on leaving the lawyer's office. Instinct rather than volition led him to the neighbourhood of the mansion occupied by the Duchess de Maillefert. "But for what?" cried his good sense. "Who knows?" replied the voice of Hope, which had not yet been stifled in his breast. "Perhaps just as you pass a curtain may be raised, and you may catch a glimpse of Mademoiselle Simone."

The Maillefert mansion stands at the corner of the Rue de Grenelle-St. Germain and the Rue de La Chaise. It is approached by a court-yard as cold and dreary as that of a prison. On either side are the domestic offices and servants' quarters. The porter's lodge is in front, and its exaggerated dimensions show that it dates from those good old days when even noblemen of the highest rank allowed their *suisse* to keep a wine shop, and even hang out a sign. The great charm of the Maillefert mansion is its garden, adjoining that of the Duc de Sairmeuse, stretching as far as the Rue de Varennes, and with its ancient trees o'ertopping the roofs of the adjoining houses. The great gate was wide open as Raymond passed by, and certainly no one would have imagined, on looking in, that the Duchess de Maillefert was ruined, and so besieged by creditors that she had to resort to the worst expedients to keep up an appearance of luxury. Three or four carriages, drawn by magnificent horses, stood waiting in the yard, while the coachmen and footmen lounged hard by and gossiped about their masters.

"What can Roberjot mean?" said Raymond to himself. "How can he say that the empire is tottering when all this luxury is still kept up?"

At this moment a brougham whisked round the corner, and Raymond only had just time to draw aside for it to enter the court-yard; a moment later he saw the Duchess de Maumussy slowly ascend the steps.

"And she will see Simone!" he thought.

He clenched his hands at the idea that the doors of this house were closed to him alone—this house which so many persons entered with smiles on their lips—and that Simone was somewhere under that roof at this moment. What was she doing? Who was torturing her now? What did they want of her, and what means would they employ to bend her to their ends? "And to think that I know nothing of the intrigue that tore her from me?" he groaned. "Why did she not allow me to die with her if I could not save her?"

He was vainly tasking his brain in an effort to think of some question he might ask to find one of the servants, when suddenly he heard a voice behind him: "Monsieur Raymond Delorge, I think?"

He hastily turned and found himself face to face with the young duke, who, with a cigar in his mouth, a glass in his eye, and a light riding-whip in his hand, was looking at him from head to foot in the most impertinent

manner. The blood rushed to Raymond's face. No man should look at him in that way, and he started forward. Suddenly, however, he checked himself. "You wish to speak to me?" he asked.

"Certainly I do," answered M. Philippe, "and I am delighted to see you—on my honour I am. You are an admirer of my sister's, I believe?"

"With the encouragement of the duchess, sir, as well as your own."

"I don't dispute that. I now simply desire to say that you must relinquish all hope."

"Do you say this from Mademoiselle Simone, sir?"

"By no means. I say it from my mother and myself; but Simone ought to have written it to you." Raymond did not reply. "I believe, in fact," resumed the duke, "that my sister did write it. That being the case, it would surely be better taste on your part to give up the idea. You agree with me, I'm sure. At Maillefert it did not so much matter; but now, having formed plans for her marriage——"

"Plans for her marriage!"

"Yes, sir, with your permission," and the duke bowed with ironical politeness. "And so," he continued, "you will do me the favour not to let me find you prowling round my house again;" and thereupon Philippe turned his back and went into the house.

Raymond was boiling over with indignation, but as he looked after Philippe he muttered to himself: "Poor fool! No, it is not at you, that I ought to strike."

It was true this last scion of the De Maillefert race was one of those persons whose utter nullity offers no salient point for hatred. Vain with the puerile vanity of imbeciles, devoured by a mad desire for show, worried by the thousand-and-one pitiful contrivances which he was forced to resort to in his wish to keep up the appearance of possessing a princely fortune, Philippe was the accomplice and the dupe of the first man who held the glittering bait of gold before his eyes. It was perfectly certain that what he had just done was in obedience to the mandates of others. Here, as at the ruins of Maillefert, he was clearly the submissive slave of some stronger will—the mere tool of an intrigue, the profits of which would not be pocketed by him.

Nevertheless, one piece of information had been gained by Raymond, namely—that they intended to marry Simone. Was this the answer to the enigma; the explanation of all the strange events which so rapidly followed one another? Was this the explanation of Simone's own mysterious conduct? But, of course, no such projects could be carried out without her consent. She was not one of those girls who could be dragged to the altar, and from whom mingled caresses and threats could elicit the irrevocable "Yes." She had proved her strength of character. So would she consent, after all her promises and oaths? Was it possible, even probable?

On the other side—perhaps the Duchess de Maillefert, aided by the Duchess de Maumussy and advised by Combelaine—had succeeded in devising some combination by which her daughter should be compelled to make this terrible sacrifice? A sentence which had dropped from Philippe's lips, as he drew his sister that day from the ruins, was full of import. "We have dirty linen to wash in the family," he had said. Now, was it not a natural inference that he had some painful and shameful confession, to make, which would require a supreme act of devotion on his sister's part? This supposition was so plausible, that Raymond's heart thrilled with hope. And yet, there was one great objection to this idea—for how could the duchess and her son, dependent as they were on Simone's income, think of

her marriage, and much less arrange it? Why had they changed their plans and their opinions so entirely? What abject calculation, what new infamy was concealed under this abrupt change of tactics? "It matters not," said Raymond to himself, "I will save Simone in spite of herself! But see her and speak to her I will."

It was now late, and the shops were closed. While thinking, he walked up and down the street opposite the Maillefert mansion, and at last espied a placard announcing "Unfurnished Rooms to let," at one of the houses on the opposite side of the way. A new idea suddenly struck him, and he rang the bell. "You want to look at the rooms to-night, at this hour?" said the *concierge*, whom he politely addressed. "No, indeed. You can come to-morrow."

But Raymond carried in his pocket certain arguments before which the man's sulkiness vanished like mist before the sun. He became all smiles, and, lighting a candle, he led the young man to a small room on the third floor, which he declared was worth a thousand francs a year. It was a most preposterous price, for the room was dirty, and so damp that the paper was peeling from the walls. However, this was of no consequence to Raymond, for on looking out of the window, he discovered that from this third floor he could see every one who entered or left the De Maillefert mansion.

"The apartment suits me," he said, "and I will take it; and drawing a twenty-franc piece from his pocket he handed it to the *concierge*, who then began to ask a multitude of questions. "Who was the gentleman? What was his name? Was he married? Had he any children? What were his references?"

These questions came so rapidly that Raymond had no time to shape his answers. He knew very well that the name of Delorge must never be mentioned in that neighbourhood; so he promptly assumed his mother's name and called himself Paul de Lespéran. He said he was employed in a lawyer's office, and unmarried; that he had always lived with his parents, and had no furniture, but would buy some. He offered to pay a quarter in advance, and this being arranged he went to a furniture dealer in the Rue Jacob, who sold him a certain amount of furniture for about double its value and engaged to install it in the room before midnight.

"I wonder if he has kept his word!" said Raymond, the next morning, as he left his mother's house. It was eight o'clock on the 30th of December, the weather was very cold, and the pavement slippery. But at all the corners groups of people were standing and talking with considerable animation.

Raymond stopped near one of them and found that the chatters were talking of Tropmann, whose trial was then going on, and the political situation also. Forty-eight hours had elapsed since the emperor had commissioned Emile Ollivier to form a ministry in "the interests of Order and Liberty," and the Parisians were anxious to know what had been done, or what was to be done.

The most absurd rumours, such as are only heard in Paris, were in circulation. According to some, Emile Ollivier had been checkmated, and his overtures repulsed—and he was about to abandon his mission. According to others, he had insisted on the emperor's acceptance of a cabinet formed of his old friends of the popular party, while others again affirmed that M. Rouher would come back with flying colours. It was clear that there was a great deal of dissatisfaction. Since the last election, the uncertainty of the future had paralyzed business—postponed projected industrial enterprises, and intimidated capitalists, who are by nature cowards, and always ready

to hide at the least alarm. However, the uncertain state of affairs did not seem to affect the retail business of the week. The New Year, with its gifts was close at hand, and Paris outwardly seemed very gay. Early as it was, the shop windows were already decked with articles suitable for presents, from things of great intrinsic worth down to trifles which only owed their value to the exquisite delicacy, skill, and taste of the workman. Seeing all this apparent prosperity, how could Raymond place unbounded faith in Roberjot's sombre prophecies? "It is precisely the same thing to-day that it has been for years" he thought. "People take their desires for realities, and I should be very foolish to count on the fall of the empire as the only means of crushing my enemies."

When he reached the room he had taken, he was pleased to find that the upholsterer had kept his promises. Everything was in readiness. He knew—for he had discovered this the evening before—that his view from his window commanded the Maillefert mansion. He opened the window and closed the shutters in such a way that he could see through them perfectly without being seen himself. Then drawing his opera glass from his pocket he scanned the mansion from top to bottom. It seemed as yet hardly awake. In the court-yard the grooms were rubbing down the horses, washing the carriages, and cleaning the harness. On the first floor the windows were open, and footmen in red vests and white aprons were shaking carpets, beating cushions, or dusting the thousand costly ornaments which were as frail and as brilliant as the Second Empire itself.

"Can this luxury be paid for?" said Raymond to himself, thinking of the duchess's extravagance and the constant manner in which she drained poor Simone.

But at this moment he heard the hoofs of a horse resounding on the pavement of the courtyard. He looked down, and beheld a gentleman who was managing a magnificent animal with consummate dexterity. As he dismounted, and threw the reins to a groom, Raymond recognized him. It was Combelaïne. What could he want there at this early hour? And Raymond watched the windows on the second floor, all of which were as yet hermetically closed, and hoped that the blinds of one of them would open and furnish him with some clew.

In this expectation he was not deceived. For, less than a minute after De Combelaïne's entrance, two windows were thrown open by a servant whom Raymond had often seen at Rosiers, and who was no less a personage than the valet of the young duke. And in the brief moment that the windows remained open Raymond caught sight of Philippe in a black velvet dressing-gown standing in front of a mirror, and of De Combelaïne seated in a large arm-chair. But he had no time to see more, for a rumble of wheels was heard, and a dark brougham, drawn by a horse that had cost at least five hundred louis, drove into the court-yard, and, making a semi-circle, drew up before the steps. The porter rang twice. Was the visit expected? At all events a window of the young duke's apartment was hastily thrown open, and De Combelaïne leaned out to see who had arrived. A footman opened the door of the brougham, from which there now alighted a stout man whom Raymond easily recognized as M. Verdale, or rather Baron Verdale. He said something to his coachman, and, like De Combelaïne, entered the mansion.

"Verdale also!" muttered Raymond. "De Maumussy will be here presently."

But he was mistaken. Ten minutes later Philippe de Maillefert left the

house. Contrary to his usual habit, the young man was dressed in black from head to foot, and, as well as Raymond could see, he was extremely pale. Behind him walked Verdale and De Combelaine in an attitude of solemn dignity, which Raymond was inclined to regard as feigned, for at one moment he noticed a glance and smile exchanged between them, which certainly suggested amusement and satisfaction. They spoke to the young duke as they took their positions, one on each side of him, and went down the steps, much as if they had been his jailers, or rather two surgeons comforting and encouraging a patient about to undergo some hideous operation.

"What on earth are they doing?" said Raymond.

All the servants seemed to be thrilled and mystified. They stood aside and pretended to be busy, but their ears and eyes were on the alert. Could it be a duel? No; for Philippe would not have required encouragement or urging were that the question involved, for, with all his faults, the young duke was no coward. To a last observation of De Combelaine's he finally snapped his fingers—a gesture which among all nations signifies—"The dice are thrown!—come what will!"

A footman now opened the door of the brougham, Verdale and the duke took their seats, De Combelaine jumped on the box, and the carriage drove off. But in vain did Raymond watch for its return. One by one the windows of the second floor were opened. The house assumed a look of life, and carriages rolled in and out of the court-yard all day long. Philippe was seen no more—and the duchess and Simone remained invisible.

Tired out at last, Raymond, when night drew near, determined on going back to his mother's, when, all at once, he espied a woman's figure in the court-yard of the mansion. "Miss Lydia Dodge!" he cried. And snatching up his hat he flew down the stairs. It was, indeed, Miss Lydia. She had just turned the corner, when Raymond overtook her. "Miss Lydia! Miss Lydia!" he cried. She turned and stopped short on recognising Raymond. "You here!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I'm here. Did you think I should stay at Rosiers?" And as she did not answer, he continued, hastily: "Where is Simone?"

"At home. But pray excuse me—this is not at all proper."

She bowed, and turned to leave him, but Raymond detained her by her sleeve.

"Dear Miss Dodge," he said, in a supplicating voice, "I implore you not to leave me like this." He knew the nature of the woman whom he addressed, and so he added gravely: "It may be that my very life depends on your telling me what has taken place."

Miss Dodge reflected, and the expression of her face betrayed that she was having a great struggle with herself. To speak was to violate the principles of her life. "Alas!" she ultimately sighed, "what do you wish me to tell you?"

"Why did Simone leave Maillefert in such haste?"

"I do not know."

"She may not have told you, but haven't you found out?"

"No."

"It must have been a terrible trial to her to come to Paris."

"Terrible!"

It was in a door-way in the Rue de La Chaise that these words were exchanged, and the spot was a most propitious one for a quiet chat, as few persons pass that way. "But come," urged Raymond gently, "there must

have been some explanation between the duke and his sister when they left me alone in the ruins."

"There was," answered Miss Dodge, sententiously. But a moment later the worthy woman seemed to have come to a heroic resolution. "I will tell you all I know, Monsieur Delorge," she said, "and you will see that it is very little. When the duke and his sister left the ruins she took his arm. I was a little in the rear, feeling heartily ashamed, for I knew myself to be in fault. However in my presence they did not exchange one word. When they reached the château they at once went to mademoiselle's little blue sitting-room, where they remained for two hours. I heard the duke's voice, sometimes supplicating, sometimes threatening. To hear the words he spoke it would have been necessary to apply my ear to the key hole; and, for the first time in my life, I was tempted to do so."

"And what did you hear?"

"I heard nothing, for I resisted the temptation. The door at last opened and Monsieur Philippe appeared. He was very pale. As he stood on the threshold he turned and said to his sister: 'I can rely on you, then?' She answered, 'I must have twenty-four hours for reflection.' Whereupon he rejoined, 'So be it—you will telegraph your decision. Don't forget that the honour of our house is in your hands.'"

This narrative confirmed all Raymond's suspicions, but it told him nothing new, nothing which threw any light on the situation. "And then?" he asked.

"The duke left. I ran into the sitting-room and I knelt down beside the poor child, and as I kissed her hands, I asked her to tell me what had happened. I shall never forget her look. I really thought her mind had gone. Then I asked her if I might send for you. She opened her lips as if to speak, but fell back on the sofa. 'No, no,' she said; 'it is not possible; I must not even think of it!' Then she said she wished to be alone, and I left the room."

In this determination to face her sorrow in solitude, Raymond recognised Simone. "And was it then that I got there?" he asked.

"Oh! no, sir, you did not come until long after that, not until after mademoiselle had rang for lights. Hearing some one speak on the stairs, I went out, and then I knew your voice. I was overjoyed, for I felt that God had sent you. But alas! you did not seem to do her any more good than I did; your presence, instead of calming her, only increased her agitation, and after your departure, I saw that your grief had added to hers, for she exclaimed over and over again, 'Poor fellow! poor fellow;' She would not let me remain with her, but I was in the next room, and I heard her walking about all night. It was most distressing. About half-past four she called to me. I ran to her, and when I saw her I caught my breath. Her tears were dried, her eyes glittered, and her face shone with the sublime resolution of a Christian martyr. I knew that her mind was made up. 'Make preparations at once for our departure,' she said. 'What!' I cried 'are we to leave Maillefert?' 'Yes, this very morning, by the eight o'clock train. You see, there is not a minute to lose. Call the servants at once.' At six o'clock everything was ready. Then mademoiselle called the gardener, who is in her confidence, and she told him to harness a vehicle to drive her to the station. He asked her for instruction as to certain matters while she was away; but she said that she had no especial orders to give, that she would probably cease to retain any active charge of her property, and that, in all probability, she should never return to Maillefert. All the

servants were in the passage when she said this, and they heard her. She called them all to her, and gave each of them something as a souvenir, and then some money. The tears came to my eyes, for I likened her to a dying woman distributing her little treasures, which she would never use again. Everybody cried, and everybody crowded round her. Mademoiselle Simone was the only one who retained her self-possession. At last the clock struck seven. 'It is time,' she exclaimed, 'our trunks were brought down,' and, at the last moment, she said to the old gardener: 'Here is a letter for Monsieur Raymond Delorge. I confide it to your care. You are to give it into his hands, but not until this afternoon, you understand me—not before that time.' In another hour we were on our way to Paris in the morning express."

Each word of this narrative showed Simone's indomitable energy. Duty ordered her, she believed, to execute a certain task, and she did so, albeit, with a crushed and bleeding heart. Raymond was the only person in the world who understood all she suffered. "And on arriving in Paris," he asked, "did Simone drive at once to her mother's house?"

"Yes sir, directly. And her arrival was greeted with transports of joy. A queen couldn't have been more *feted*."

"And since then, what life has she led?"

"She has spent all her mornings with lawyers."

"And later in the day?"

"With her mother or mother's friends, Madame de Maumussy and the Baronne de Trigault."

"But does she never go out?"

"I went with her yesterday to Sainte Clotilde to hear mass."

Raymond stored this fact in his memory. "Is she free to go where she chooses?" he asked.

"Free. Of course she is; quite as much mistress of her actions as when at Maillefert. Who would interfere with her?"

"But does she never speak of me?"

"Never, sir. Once, however, I dared to say something to her, and for the first time since I have known her, mademoiselle was quite harsh to me. 'If you mention that name again,' she said, 'I shall be forced to part from you.'"

It was with a despairing gesture that Raymond received this reply "But, Miss Dodge," he exclaimed, "I implore you to tell her that I have met you, that I am desperate, and that I must see her, if it be only for five minutes."

The good-hearted woman stopped him, and carried away by his emotion, and the thought of this great passion, such a one, as she herself had never inspired, she said: "In spite of her injunction I will this very night tell her what you say. Good-bye!"

III.

It was a formidable step for Miss Dodge to take; not that she ran any risk of losing the support of her old age, for she was sure that Simone could never allow her to want for anything; but she felt it possible that Simone might separate from her, and, to her mind, this separation was worse than death. Raymond had left her without giving her any indication of where

she might see him to tell him the result of her step. He had taken no pains to do this, as thanks to the lodgings he occupied, he knew he could always join the governess whenever she went out. He was too much absorbed in wondering what would be Simone's decision to think of much else. Would she consent to this interview which he asked for so earnestly? He was still persuaded that it was only the poor child's fortune that her family coveted, and that if he entreated her to let them have it, he might perhaps win her consent. In fact, he felt so hopeful on this point that when he went home to dinner, his mother said: "You have had a successful day, my son, I see. You have seen our friends, and have learned that we have a firm foundation for our hopes."

"I have seen Monsieur Roberjot," he answered, merely for the sake of saying something.

His mother paid little heed to his vague responses, but such was not the case with Pauline, who, when alone with him after dinner, pressed his hand, and said: "Poor dear Raymond! You are very unhappy!"

He could not restrain a movement of impatience, for he was intensely annoyed by his sister's perseverance in trying to find out his thoughts. "Tell me, child," he said, abruptly, "what notion have you got in your head?"

He looked her straight in the eyes as he spoke. She turned crimson, and trying to conceal her embarrassment under a light laugh, replied: "I don't know, but Monsieur Roberjot takes his political difficulties very differently to you." Her brother did not speak, and the girl added in a serious tone. "I won't insist—and yet, I might perhaps give you some confidences in return."

At another time, Raymond would have asked for an explanation of these words, which were, to say the least, a little singular. But the selfishness of passion restrained him. He merely said to himself: "So Mademoiselle Pauline loves somebody, and this is what renders her so clear-sighted."

He thought nothing more of the matter during the rest of the evening which he spent with his mother and sister, and on retiring to his room his only reflection was that the next day was the 1st of January, and he probably should not have a couple of hours to himself to run to the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain. Madame Delorge, in fact, was in the habit every New Year's Day of receiving the small number of friends who had remained faithful to her. At nine o'clock Madame Cornevin and her daughters arrived, followed by M. Ducoudray, whose eyes were as bright as the brilliants in a pair of ear-rings which he presented to Pauline. M. Roberjot also soon appeared, weighed down by boxes of *bonbons*; and as he entered the room he shouted out: "All hail to 1870, which will give liberty and happiness to France!"

"Amen!" answered Ducoudray.

Raymond went to greet the lawyer, who continued: "In a year from now you will tell me if you can what has become of all these people—the Count de Combelaïne, the Duke de Maumussy, the dear Princess d'Eljensen, to say nothing of my excellent friend Verdale. To-morrow the *Officiel* will speak, and you will see what the new ministry is."

The next day, as Roberjot stated, the *Journal Officiel* published the names of the men chosen by Emile Ollivier, as his colleagues in the administration, which will always be known in history as the "Ministry of the 2nd of January." The truth is that France had a flash of hope and liberty that day. On reading the names of the men who were to take the helm of the State,

the public believed that the ruin which had seemed so imminent would be avoided. They hoped that the horrors of a contest would be averted. "We can breathe once more!" people said to each other. And a general feeling of confidence arose, and a return of commercial prosperity was anticipated.

What became of the theories indulged in by Madame Delorge, who had so long looked forward to the fall of the empire—the fall which would hurl her enemies from the positions they had so long occupied, and place her husband's murderers in her power? And Raymond himself realized that he, too, had been lulled by the deceitful hope that some great political catastrophe, would detach Madame de Maillefert from her new friends, and save Simone. That very evening a letter came from his old friend the baron which confirmed his fears and bade him hasten on with his task. "There are strange reports here," wrote the old engineer. "I am told that Mademoiselle Simone will never return to Maillefert, but has decided to sell all her property, even to the château itself. According to Bizet, who is not such a bad fellow, after all, the sale will take place early in February. But the people about here are quite in despair, as they are told that everything will no doubt be bought up by a great Parisian capitalist. I spare you all comments. You ought to know the truth. Let me hear it, that I may preserve my reputation of being a well-informed man. And pray tell me a little about yourself at the same time."

Alas! Raymond knew no more than did the baron. After reading this letter he started for the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, where an immense surprise awaited him, for as he took his key from the concierge, the woman exclaimed: "Some one came here for you this morning, sir."

Who could know that he had taken this apartment, and by what name had they asked for him? "Who came for me?" he asked.

"A gentleman, sir. I was just sweeping the stairs when he called."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'Is my friend in?' And then I said, 'What friend?' He replied, 'The one who moved in three days ago.' 'Ah! you mean Monsieur de Lespéran?' said I, and he answered, 'Precisely.' When I told him you were out, he seemed very much annoyed, and went away, saying he would call again."

Raymond did not like this, for the mysterious visitor had carefully managed to find out by what name he was known in the house; and this had no doubt been his only object. However Raymond wished to discover if the woman had any suspicions. "It was one of my friends, I presume," he said with affected carelessness. "But why didn't he leave his name?"

"I don't know, I am sure."

"And you didn't ask it? No? Well, that's a great pity. Perhaps you can describe him. Let's see. Was he young or old?"

"Neither the one nor the other."

"Thin or stout?"

"Medium."

"Dark or light?"

"Oh! light; very light."

Raymond felt that this sort of thing might go on interminably, so he made no further questions. "Another time," he said to the woman, "you had better ask the names of the people who come to see me."

But his indifference was affected, for he clearly realised that he was watched. He thought of Laurent Cornevin, but rejected the idea as the wildest folly. "If Laurent wished to speak to me," he said to himself, "he

would have written to my mother's to appoint a rendezvous." So a new care was added to his life, and a sharp one, too, for he did not take a step without imagining that some one was at his heels; that he was incessantly being watched, and that each of his actions had an invisible witness. This sort of infamy was very like Philippe, and still more characteristic of De Combelaïne.

This day which began so badly, was not destined to end very favourably either. It was in vain that he sat looking out of the window; neither Simone nor Miss Dodge gave any sign of life. Nor was he any more fortunate on the following day, when he literally did not leave his observatory. By the end of the week he did not know what to think. Had Miss Dodge deceived him? Had she pretended to be moved by his entreaties merely to get rid of him? Or had she kept her promise, and been pitilessly dismissed in consequence?

However, on Sunday morning, while Raymond was eating his heart out in despair, he suddenly saw Simone come down the steps. But faithful Lydia Dodge was not with her. She was accompanied by a maid whose face was new to Raymond, and who carried a prayer-book. He hurried down stairs so rapidly that Simone was still in sight when he reached the street. But she was far away, and walking rapidly. It was evident that she was going to Ste. Clotilde. Raymond passed her and looked back. Their eyes met. She started, but went on and entered the church.

"And yet she saw me," he thought. "All hope isn't lost." He was now in an agony to know by which door Simone would leave, so that he might meet her face to face.

Mass being over, she did not immediately rise from her knees, but at last she crossed the nave and went towards the main portal opening on the square.

Raymond who was watching her, thereupon went out by one of the side doors, and reached the bottom of the steps just as she did. He hesitated to speak to her on account of the maid, but she came straight towards him. "You are not acting right, Monsieur Delorge," she said.

He was startled to see how thin and pale she looked. She was the very shadow of herself.

But in a firm, clear voice she continued: "Did you not receive my last letter? Did I not bid you forget me?"

Raymond shook his head. "In that last letter," he replied, "you told me that you were a most unhappy woman. I have therefore come to tell you that my life is devoted to you. Ought I not to know what has happened to you? Have I not a right to ask this? I must see you. I must speak to you."

She hesitated. And then, in a quiet low voice, she said: "Very well. Here. To-morrow. Four o'clock."

There was nothing in Simone's manner, nothing in her words or looks, which could encourage Raymond's hopes. But he would have preferred almost anything to this horrible uncertainty and mystery.

The next day, long before the appointed hour, he was outside Ste. Clotilde, walking slowly round the square. The sky was gray, the weather cold. The garden was deserted, hardly a human being to be seen. Night was coming on earlier than usual on account of the thick fog. At last the clock struck four, and two women appeared—Simone and Miss Lydia. So the poor governess had not been sent away. Simone saw Raymond at a distance and walked towards him. "Give me your arm," she said, as they

met, "and let us walk on." He complied: and after a moment's silence, she said abruptly: "You have had your own way—I am here; you insisted on it."

"I insisted!"

"Certainly; in such a way, too, that it almost amounted to a persecution. Didn't my brother meet you close to our house and was it not owing to his moderation that no altercation took place?"

An exclamation of anger, mingled with regret, escaped from Raymond's lips. "True!" he said, bitterly; "Monsieur Philippe was good enough not to strike me."

"And this is not all. You have won my governess over to your side, and induced her to disobey my orders."

Was this really Simone who spoke? "I wished so much to see you," said Raymond, penitently.

"And why, pray?" asked the young girl, in a cold, constrained tone. "Was it to hear me say what I wrote? Very well then, I will repeat it. We are forever separated. We must forget each other; I choose it to be so."

She spoke clearly and without hesitation, and in such a loud voice that it was fortunate the square was deserted.

"And I," said Raymond, "wish to know your reasons for this separation."

"My reasons!" repeated the young girl, in a tone the haughtiness of which would have done credit to her mother. "Since when, pray, have I ceased to be mistress of my own actions? I do what I please to do!"

Fortunately, there are exaggerations which so exceed all limits that it is easy to divine they are contrary to truth. The more sternly Simone treated Raymond, the better satisfied he was. He stopped short and looked full into the girl's eyes. "You are sublime!" he said.

"Sir!" she stammered, bitterly disconcerted. "Raymond!"

But he went on. "Do you consider me, then, so poor of comprehension that I cannot understand you? Undeceive yourself. You are doing your best to make me love you less. And now that their abominable intrigue tears you from me, you wish to seem as if you renounced me voluntarily. You show your heroism by trying to make me feel a certain contempt for you, thinking that in that way I shall regret you less."

She tried to protest, but her words died away on her lips.

"You forgot the oath we swore to each other," continued Raymond. "We were to fight this battle together, we were to conquer or perish together."

Simone had relied too much on her own strength. "I entreat you," she murmured, "not to speak in this way."

"It must be, for you owe me the truth."

"Then listen," she began; but checking herself with a nervous start, she exclaimed: "No, never! never!"

Raymond felt that victory was about to escape him.

"Must I then save you in spite of yourself?" he cried.

She turned upon him like a flash. "How do you know that I wish to be saved?" she asked. "I ought not to be, and I will not be. It is too late, besides. All that you do now will only tend to render the horrible sacrifice which I have made a useless one. I ought not to have come here. But I trust that you will carry away with you a recollection of poor Simone that will not be without sweetness. For this is the last time we shall ever meet."

"No; I will not allow you to go with those words on your lips."

But she had taken Miss Lydia's arm. "I entreat you," she cried, "don't rob me of my courage; I need it all. Farewell."

When Raymond knew what he was doing, after wandering for hours through Paris, he found himself on one of the boulevards, near a group of men, who were listening to a person who said:

"Victor Noir has been killed by Prince Pierre Bonaparte. I am sure of what I say, for I have just come from Auteuil."

IV.

THIS report was true, and darting like a train of gunpowder along the boulevard it spread all over Paris.

On that same afternoon—it was Monday, January 10th, 1870—two journalists, Victor Noir and Ulrich de Fonvielle, called on Prince Pierre Bonaparte, who then lived at Auteuil, in the house once occupied by the philosopher Helvétius. They came at the request of one of their friends, Pascal Grousset, to ask the meaning of certain articles published by the Prince in a journal called *L'Avenir*. The Prince was, that day, expecting the seconds of Henri Rochefort, and these gentlemen were received. Ten minutes later several detonations resounded through the house. Almost immediately a man rushed out, pale and with both hands clasped over his breast. He fell on the sidewalk outside. He was dead. This was Victor Noir.

A moment later another man appeared, pale and terrified, with a revolver in hand. "Let no one enter that house," he cried, "for a murderer lives there." This man was Ulrich de Fonvielle.

Such were the facts which were circulated from mouth to mouth. But what had taken place in the house? No one seemed to know. Public opinion was perplexed, for two parties instantly formed, each claiming to know the truth. According to one account Pierre Bonaparte, attacked and insulted under his own roof, had, in killing Victor Noir, only availed himself of the right which every man possesses to defend himself. According to others, and to the majority of people, there had not been the smallest provocation, and Victor Noir had fallen a victim to a most cowardly attack. Between the two opposing parties there were certain sensible persons who tried to make themselves heard. "Suppose we ascertain the exact truth before we decide?" they said.

But their eloquence was thrown away, for Paris was in a fever. The boulevards were crowded, the cafés vociferous; groups gathered at the corners, and angry murmurs arose while an ominous agitation reigned in the faubourgs.

When Raymond saw his mother that evening he found that she had heard of this event, and was greatly agitated by it. "Is not the finger of God distinctly visible in this?" she exclaimed. "At the very moment when the empire appeared to be gaining strength once more, is there not something absolutely startling in the death of this young man, whose name, yesterday totally unknown, may to-morrow prove a watchword and the rallying-cry of a revolution?"

But Prince Pierre was arrested, and the investigation began. Paris learnt this by the morning papers, which published a statement from the Minister of Justice.

"What's the use?" said Roberjot to Raymond—"what magistrate is

capable of eliciting the truth in this most wretched affair " Then, shaking his head, he added : " Don't you see that this is the beginning of the end ? "

Raymond saw that the *Marseillaise* newspaper came out in mourning, with a leading article, written by Rochefort—a cry of hatred and anger calculated to penetrate into the most secluded workshops. But there was no need of trying to increase the excitement. The greatest optimist must have felt the burning blast of this terrific storm. The 11th was employed in preparations for the funeral, and all day long pilgrimages were made to Neuilly, where Victor Noir's body had been removed. The interment was fixed to take place at the cemetery of Père La Chaise, on the following day, when a cold, icy rain set in.

" If it rains—there will be no trouble," Pétion remarked on a famous occasion during the great Revolution ; but this time there was too much excitement for people to care for the weather. Before daybreak the army, commanded by Marshal Canrobert, was on foot. The garrison from Versailles had been brought into Paris. Troops had been massed on the Champ de Mars, and round about the Palais de l'Industrie, while brigades of police were scattered all along either side of the Avenue de la Grand Armée. An immense crowd surged towards Neuilly, and, amid the throng, circulated a number of newspaper vendors, selling *La Marseillaise* and *L'Eclipse*. The latter journal represented Victor Noir dead, and the hawkers cried aloud : " Two sous for the body!—two sous! "

It was then one o'clock in the afternoon. The critical moment was approaching. Would there be any military demonstration as the bier entered the cemetery ? Must the friends of Victor Noir take the bier on their shoulders and revolvers in their hands ? Pushed on by the crowd, Raymond found himself in the very front, and almost inside the house of mourning. He saw all the chiefs of this movement pass before him—all those who possessed, or thought they possessed, any influence—all those who were expected to give an order or a signal. It was half-past one when Henri Rochefort, the famous pamphleteer, arrived : he was paler than usual, and his face bore signs of violent emotion. As he entered a small anteroom, next to the apartment where the body lay, he sank on to a chair, and said : " Give me a glass of water ; I am utterly exhausted ! "

In the same room there was an Englishman, who seemed cold, stiff, and impassible. He drew a flask from his pocket, and handed it to Rochefort. " Drink this," he said, " it is rum. "

" Thanks ! " replied Rochefort, " I never take anything of the kind. "

The Englishman returned the flask to his pocket, and, shrugging his shoulders, said : " You are wrong ; a little rum is a good thing when a man is at the head of a movement like this, and when he is as agitated as you are ; " and, turning to Raymond, who had just entered, he added : " Don't you agree with me, sir ? "

Raymond had no time to reply to this singular person, for people crowded round Rochefort, crying : " What shall be done ? What have you decided on ? "

He hesitated. No doubt he said to himself that if a collision were to take place, this great crowd would be slaughtered ; and that one word from his lips might be the signal for terrible bloodshed.

A man came in with eager eyes—" Shall we march towards Paris ? " he asked.

" Who gave you the right to question me ? " rejoined Rochefort.

" The people, whose representative you are. "

"I have no orders to receive from you."

"So much the worse, then!" And jamming his hat down over his eyes, the man went out, pushing his way through the crowd on the staircase.

A moment more and Rochefort followed him. Victor Noir's brother had come for him, and implored him not to allow any bloodshed. The discussion was most violent, but finally the advice of Delescluze* was asked, and it was decided that the interment should take place in the cemetery at Neuilly.

Standing at a window, Rochefort announced this determination to the crowd, saying it was the wish of the family, and should be respected as such. Around the house these words met with approval. But Raymond heard a man in the crowd mutter, "What have the family to do with it? The body belongs to the Democracy. It ought to be borne through Paris!"

The coffin was removed from the house and placed on a funeral car. As soon as it appeared there was a rush and a push among the crowd. Raymond was near the hearse, and a man in a blouse caught him by the throat and threw him back against the wheel. He would have fallen to the ground had not the same Englishman whom he had seen with the flask of rum come to his assistance. He dealt the man in the blouse a formidable blow on the chest, and helped Raymond up again. "In a crowd like this," he said, coldly, "you ought never to allow yourself to be hustled and grasped like that."

"You have in all probability, sir, saved my life——" said young Delorge.

"I should be glad if it were so," interrupted the Englishman; "but it's nothing, I assure you—nothing worth talking about. But excuse me for leaving you so abruptly, the hearse is moving, and I don't wish to lose one detail of the ceremony."

The hearse moved through the immense crowd, and slowly took its way towards the little cemetery of Neuilly. Behind it walked Rochefort and Ulrich de Fonvielle, whose overcoat was literally in rags. And thousands followed—Raymond among them. He had been separated from the Englishman, but he had not lost sight of him for a moment. "What a strange person!" thought Raymond, who was much puzzled.

But he had no time for further reflection. The procession had suddenly halted. "What is the matter?" asked the people round about him; "what has happened?"

Rochefort had succumbed to his emotions, and, fainting away, had been carried into a neighbouring shop. "He's dead," cried the mob.

No; he had but fainted, and it was not long before he recovered. But this incident put an end to all idea of carrying the bier through Paris to Père La Chaise, and lassitude and discouragement began working on this crowd, which had been on foot all day in the mud and rain. It moved on more rapidly to the cemetery at Neuilly, where some friends of Victor Noir uttered a few hot words of vengeance.

When Rochefort was better, he sent for a cab, and ordered the coachman to drive back to Paris. Then those who had declared for war regained heart. In fact, the scene was a terrible one. It was growing dark. The light fog which had followed the rain imparted vague form to everything. The clouds, massed in the west, were tinged by the setting sun with an angry glow. At least two hundred thousand people of all ages and classes were

* The famous agitator who, becoming a member of the Commune in 1871, was shot down behind a barricade when the Versailles troops entered Paris.—*Trans.*

slowly marching towards the Arc de Triomphe, singing revolutionary songs at the top of their voices, and uttering occasional roars like wild beasts. What would happen when this crowd met the police massed around the Arc de Triomphe? Nothing at all happened—the police withdrew and calmly watched the black mass march past them.

"Where are we going?" people asked each other.

The column went down the Champs Elysées, and the songs were louder than ever, when all at once, on approaching the open space near the Palais de l'Industrie, the mob came to a stand-still. Here several regiments of cavalry were drawn up, and soon, above the tumult of voices and songs, one could hear the rolling of drums. Rochefort leaped from his cab, and, followed by two friends, approached a commissary of police, who, with his scarf round his waist, stood in advance of the troops, and barred the avenue.

"I wish to pass," said Rochefort.

"You cannot go any farther," answered the commissary.

"But I am Henri Rochefort, a deputy of the Corps Legislatif."

"If you go on," was the reply, "you will be the first man cut down, that's all!"

And thereupon there was a second roll of the drums, and a squadron of cavalry advanced. This time Rochefort had no decision to take. One of those panics which at times sweep through armies like a cloud of dust through the streets, had seized hold of this crowd, whose imprecations had rent the air but a moment before, and, in the twinkling of an eye, it was dispersed. And when Raymond went home again, Paris was as quiet as he had ever known it.

"Well?" cried worthy old Ducoudray, who, owing to a severe cold, had to his great despair, been unable to go to Neuilly.

"Paris is calm," answered the young man, in a gloomy tone; "it's all over—this was but a false alarm!"

Such, however, was not the opinion of M. Roberjot, who, that same evening, called on Madame Delorge, and related how stormy the sitting of the Chamber had been, the new prime minister having exclaimed: "We have been all justice and moderation so far. Now we will use force, if need be." And thereupon Roberjot added that a request for authority to commence proceedings against Rochefort had been sent to the President of the Corps Legislatif, and that it would certainly be granted. "Then we shall see!" he added, rubbing his hands.

Raymond listened, frowning. It was not mere curiosity which had taken him to that day's funeral. He knew that a revolution was his only salvation. If the imperial *régime* crumbled, De Combelaïne and De Maumussy would surely be crushed by its fall, the duchess and her son would be checked in their wild career, and Simone might perhaps be his. So with the idea of watching the movement, and, perhaps, of assisting in its success, he had gone to Neuilly. He did not repent having done so, but at the close of this terrible day he felt utterly worn out, physically and mentally. Was not Simone lost to him? He knew her well enough to realise that he need never try to change her determination again. He knew that she would heroically and nobly accomplish her sacrifice, without condescending to spare herself a single pang. "I don't choose to be saved," she had said. "Besides, it is too late; you will only render my sacrifices useless."

What sacrifices had she alluded to? He might have submitted to a known and measured catastrophe, but to bend under a mysterious, nameless misfortune struck him as the height of misery and shame.

He loved Simone, and she loved him, and yet they were separated. He was not thirty, but he thought his life finished—his present without hope, his future without promise. Assuredly, but for the thought of his mother, he would have put an end to an existence which had grown well nigh intolerable to him. But had he the right to dispose of himself like that? Would it not be an act of utter baseness to abandon this noble woman, who only lived for the sake of her children? One night her murdered husband had been brought home to her. Was the body of her son, killed by his own hand, also to be carried through her door. "I must continue to live," thought Raymond.

His father's murder had not been avenged. And the murderers, were they not the same wretches whom he suspected of having originated this dark intrigue which was killing Simone by inches?

The empire was still audacious in its iniquity, and Raymond determined to enroll himself among the dissaffected—among those who were always plotting, and always ready for a rising, arms in hand.

As M. Roberjot had foreseen, the shock caused by Victor Noir's death, and the scenes at his funeral, increased rather than diminished. The Cabinet of the 2nd of January had not perceived this event on the cards the day it undertook to rule France. The force of events led Emile Ollivier on a fatal descent, from which he could not rise again, and he slipped lower and lower without the smallest idea what he should find at the end of his fall. The Chamber authorized proceedings against Rochefort on account of his article in *La Marseillaise*—and he was condemned to six months' imprisonment and to three thousand francs fine. This occurred on January 22nd. No one supposed, however, that this judgment would be carried into execution. People were mistaken. On the 7th of February, Raymond had gone to the Chamber to hear what was going on, when he met Roberjot, who, heated by debate, had come outside for fresh air. "It is a vote, and no mistake," he said. "The Chamber authorizes the arrest and fine."

"It's terrible," rejoined Raymond.

It was certainly a very bold proceeding to arrest a man whose popularity was then literally boundless. Many revolutions have often succeeded which had less to start from. However, the ministry were committed to this course, and the order for arrest was given.

That same evening, as Rochefort was passing along through the Rue de Flandres, on the way to the printing office of *La Marseillaise*, he was arrested and carried off in a cab, hastily summoned from the stand hard by.

He was perfectly calm, and begged his friends to make no appeal to the people. The request was futile. There was a public meeting that night at the Café Favié in the Rue de Menilmontant, and Flourens, who presided, jumped upon a bench and summoned his adherents to arms, after which, pointing a revolver at a commissary of police, who chanced to enter the establishment, he exclaimed: "I arrest you! not one word, or I shoot you where you stand!"

For the second time within a month Raymond held his breath, waiting for the explosion which he expected would follow. Indeed a formidable uproar succeeded Flourens's words, and folks applauded the desperate act by which he tried to set the ball a rolling. There were three hundred men in that café, and all swore with frightful oaths that there must and should be a change of government. Outside, the crowd was constantly increasing. Most of the street lamps had been extinguished, and groups of men and even women had gathered at all the corners. Flourens, who was always

ready to believe what he wished, always prepared to accept the chimeras of his imagination for facts, considered that Paris was ripe for a revolution. He left the café, and still holding his revolver pointed at the commissary, he went through the faubourg. Some sixty young men followed him. They were unarmed, but they kept up their courage by bellowing wild songs.

Carried away by his own private wrongs, Raymond began himself to address the crowd, and proposed to march on Sainte Pélacie, and deliver Rochefort, when all at once a hoarse voice interrupted him with the words: "That is a nice proposal indeed. This fellow wishes to get us out of the faubourg to deliver us up to the police. But we know him."

Raymond began to protest, but very uselessly. His air and manner, clothes, voice and way of speaking were all against him. "You are a spy!" said a stout young fellow, elbowing him roughly.

It was so dark that Raymond could not see the faces of those around him. Quite new to these scenes of tumult, he tried to make himself heard. But suddenly the cry was raised: "Let us settle the spy!" And at the same moment he was caught round the shoulders and by the legs by lithe vigorous arms. "To the canal with him! To the canal!" cried the crowd. Raymond realized his danger. With a sudden effort he loosened the arms round his shoulders, with a kick he sent the fellow who had him by the legs rolling in the gutter, and then setting himself firmly, he clenched his fists and cried: "Look out!"

There were ten seconds' hesitation, but the group was like tinder, these words were a match, and the affair would have ended disastrously had not a tall fellow in a blouse sprang before young Delorge exclaiming: "I know the citizen. He's as true as steel!"

"He's a spy!" howled the crowd.

"A spy," repeated the man with an oath. "Where's the fellow who dares to say that a friend of mine is a spy? Just let him come forward and say it to me!"

There was no reply, whereupon the man drew Raymond out of the crowd and as soon as they were beyond hearing, exclaimed: "Be off with you! Your place isn't here."

"And yet——"

"Keep your courage for a better occasion."

"What! Hasn't the contest already begun?"

The man shrugged his shoulders, and, in a tone of utter contempt, replied, "The contest! You believe in one, do you?"

He turned away, but Raymond stopped him. "At least tell me your name, so that I may know to whom I am indebted."

The man seemed to consider this question a very natural one. "I am called Tellier," he said, "I'm a workman at the Entrepot."

"My name is Raymond Delorge, and I should like——"

"To pay for drinks! Oh, yes, I see. But all the wine shops are shut." And darting off, he was soon lost in the darkness.

Raymond stood still looking and listening. The excitement in the faubourg seemed to him to be too great to be easily calmed. Men were hurrying past seemingly on their way to some rendezvous, and the cab-drivers were whipping up their animals, as if they feared that their vehicles would be seized to form a barricade.

"I must see some more," said Raymond to himself. "I cannot go home now!" And he hurried towards a spot where a loud din was being kept up.

It was Flourens and his little band, all singing the "Marseillaise" at the top of their voices. Flourens himself was beginning to feel that he was the victim of his own illusions, for, although the windows were thrown open as he passed, and inquisitive heads peered out of the houses, only imprecations answered his stormy appeals. He obtained no fresh support, and indeed his followers were steadily decreasing, as they fell off to answer the questions of lookers on. He had confidently expected to find an army at Belleville, but he merely met about a hundred men insufficiently equipped, "If we only had some arms!" was the cry.

Then the singular idea struck him there would, at least, be some guns in the property-room at the Belleville theatre. But when he arrived there all his followers had slunk away, and, but for one boy of seventeen, he would have been altogether alone. Quite desperate, he regained the street, his overcoat over his arm, a revolver in one hand, and a sword in the other. He then began to rush about in search of combatants and paving stones. However, he found the police, who were dispersing the last remnants of the crowd, and, with difficulty escaped from their clutches. And when, about midnight, Raymond returned to his mother's house, he said to Ducoudray, who was waiting there: "Things are all smooth again!"

The worthy old man shrugged his shoulders. "In my time," he replied, "in 1830, it would have ended very differently."

V.

But things were not so smooth as Raymond fancied. If February 8th passed off quietly enough during the daylight, at nightfall the fever began again. A dozen barricades were thrown up in the Rue de Paris, at Belleville, in the Rue Saint Maur, the Rue de la Douane, and the Faubourg du Temple. And, on the next evening, fresh scenes of disorder occurred. The riots was confined, however, to Belleville and the Faubourg du Temple. And, as during the previous summer, loungers went out with cigars in their mouths, after dinner, to look on and amuse themselves. But their amusement was of short duration, for, on the 10th, after three or four hundred arrests, the streets resumed their usual aspect, and it seemed probable that Rochefort would spend his six months in prison.

"Probable, of course," said Roberjot: "but by no means certain." And although frankly confessing that such scenes detached timid souls from the cause of liberty, he complacently proceeded to enumerate all the storms which were gathering on the Imperial horizon; speaking of the trial of Prince Pierre Bonaparte, by the High Court of Justice, the strikes which were being constantly organized among the working classes, the stagnation of trade, and the general uneasiness felt in regard to the future.

But Raymond had other cares. Reasoning carefully, he had begun to suspect a connection between the mysterious visitor, who had called at the Rue de Grenelle and certain events of the preceding days. At Neuilly, at the funeral of Victor Noir, he would have been thrown down and trampled upon but for the interference of an unknown individual, an Englishman of most eccentric appearance. On the evening of Rochefort's arrest, a workman had appeared at the very nick of time, and rescued him from a group of furious malcontents.

These two circumstances which had not struck him at the time now assumed the greatest possible significance in his eyes; and he asked himself

if the mysterious visitor, the Englishman at Neuilly, and the workman in the blouse were not one and the same person. And who could this person be, if not Laurent Cornevin? He possessed a means, a method of verifying the exactitude of his conjectures, at least up to a certain point. The workman had told him that his name was Tellier, and that he was employed at the Entrepot. "I will at once ascertain," said Raymond, "if this man is to be found: but I feel certain he is not there. If my suspicions are correct he gave me a false name and a false address."

An hour later he alighted from a cab in the Rue de Flandres, and patiently began his investigations. He found that the name of Tellier was utterly unknown at the Entrepot. In vain did he question every one, from the foremen to the lowest workmen. No one had ever seen or heard of a man named Tellier. "That's precisely what I imagined," said Raymond to himself as he turned his face homewards.

Now, the question arose how he might put himself into communication with Laurent Cornevin, and finally, after long meditation, Raymond thought he had found a means. "If Laurent is thus watching over me," he said, "it is because he feels a sincere and deep affection for me. If he knew my unhappiness, he would do his best to assist me; so I have only to acquaint him with it."

Accordingly young Delorge wrote this letter: "You came to inquire for Monsieur de Lespéran. Are you the man I suppose—the old friend and partner of Monsieur Pécheira? If so, I entreat you, in the name of Heaven, to let me see you and speak to you. Need I swear the most profound secrecy? My happiness—my very life—are at stake!" Raymond placed this urgent entreaty in an envelope, and, after sealing it in a way to defy prying curiosity, he confided it to the concierge of the Rue de Grenelle-Saint-Germain, and begged her to hand it to the first person who came to ask for him by name.

Of course this was a very frail chance on which to fasten his hopes, but at all events it gave him courage to seem interested in the new arrangements which were contemplated by his mother, who, delighted that her son would now be with her in Paris, had rented a small apartment adjoining her own, and opened doors of communication. This gave her two rooms for Raymond's especial use; and she arranged them charmingly, decorating them with many of the pictures and art treasures she had inherited from the Baron de Glorière. To these same rooms she also carried the portrait of General Delorge. "It belongs to you by right, my son," she said, "it will remind you of the past and of your duty, if you are ever in danger of forgetting it."

But there was little danger of forgetfulness on Raymond's part. Each hour of the last month had added another drop of bitterness to the fury that raged in his heart. To crush Combelaïne and Maumussy was the one idea that haunted him. It was with this idea, indeed, that he joined one of the secret societies which were undermining the empire. This society met at a little house in the Rue des Cinq Moulins, at Montmartre, and was called "The Society of the Friends of Justice." An ex-representative was at its head, and a large number of lawyers, artists, and medical students, were among its members. They met in the evening, twice or three times in the week. The avowed aim of the society, in case the police discovered its existence, was the propagation of democratic journals and books, but its real object was to recruit and arm a body of men in the provinces, which, at the first signal, would appear and assist the Parisians in winning the victory.

Raymond never knew the precise strength of this society, but once he heard the president say: "We have over fifty thousand guns."

Was this the truth? Raymond could not answer this question to his own satisfaction. He was not long in seeing, however, that his new friends had no great confidence in immediate success, and that if he achieved his own ends, it would not be through them.

With all his thoughts directed toward the mysterious visitor—whom he steadfastly imagined to be Cornevin—he repaired each day to the Rue de Grenelle to ask the concierge if anyone had been there. "No one," she replied, for four days in succession.

But on the fifth, as soon as Raymond opened the door, she exclaimed: "He has been here!"

Raymond's surprise was so great that he turned pale. "And you gave him my letter?" he asked.

"Of course."

"And what did he say?"

"He seemed very much astonished at your leaving a letter for him; and he turned it over and over in his hand. At last he opened it, and turned as red as a beet when he read it. He exclaimed: 'Good God!' and went right off."

Raymond was greatly disturbed, but he preserved an unmoved countenance; for he felt that the keen black eyes of the concierge were rivetted on him. "And is that all my friend said?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; every word."

"And did he say nothing about leaving an answer?"

"No."

"Nor did he ask at what hour he would find me in?"

"Not he. He swore like a trooper, and ran away like a madman."

Raymond did not dare ask another question, for the woman's curiosity was evidently aroused, and he had no means of judging whether she would prove an ally or an enemy. So he laughed carelessly as he turned away, saying: "I will arrange all that."

He took his key and locked himself in his room, where he could abandon himself to the terrible apprehensions which assailed him. If the story told by the concierge was correct—and he had every reason to believe it was—the man to whom his letter was given was not Laurent Cornevin. Was it possible he had been unfortunate enough to assist his mortal enemies by revealing Cornevin's existence to them. "I fear I am fatal to everyone who is interested in me!" he muttered, as he paced the room in agony of mind.

He scarcely glanced at the Maillefert mansion that day, but towards evening he went and looked out. The weather was mild; the windows of the mansion were open, and, some six or eight men, white-cravated, pale, and solemn, were seated round a table covered with papers. What did this gathering mean? wondered Raymond. However, soon afterwards lamps were brought in, and the servants closed the windows. He could see no more.

"I shall not come again," he thought, as, utterly depressed and discouraged, he started homewards. But he had scarcely turned the corner than he heard himself called. It was the voice of Miss Dodge, and on recognising it he rushed towards her.

She seemed very much startled by her own audacity, and trembled like a leaf, looking round her with a frightened gaze. "For three days," she said, "I have been trying to see you."

On hearing this, Raymond felt that some new misfortune awaited him. 'Did Mademoiselle Simone send you?' he asked.

"No; it is entirely without her knowledge that I have been watching for you."

"What has happened. Tell me at once."

"Mademoiselle is to be married. I heard her give her promise to her mother."

This frightful intelligence, after all that Simone had said, was quite unexpected by Raymond. "Simone to be married!" he gasped—"and to whom?"

"Ah! that I don't know. But I do know that it will kill her. She is dying, Monsieur Delorge—I tell you she is dying! And realizing this as I do, I determined to find you. What is to be done?"

This was the problem which had faced Raymond now for months, and to the elucidation of which he had applied all his intelligence—all his energy. "What is to be done?" he exclaimed, wildly. "Ah! who knows? To live in this way—to be always struggling in the darkness, without one ray of light to guide me; to be surrounded by enemies, and yet never meet them face to face; to be constantly struck at, and yet never see where the blows come from. Ah! if Simone would only have consented! But, no! It is she who has tied my hands and reduced me to this miserable position, to this humiliating existence, to this endless contest! It pleased her to sacrifice herself, and she has done so! I shall perish with her, but little does she care! No, no, Miss Dodge, Simone never loved me!"

With an indignant gesture, as if she heard an absolute blasphemy, the governess exclaimed: "You have not understood me! I tell you, mademoiselle will not live until the marriage!"

Raymond checked himself suddenly. The very violence of his emotion ended by giving him that lucidity peculiar to mad men, and which often imparts an appearance of logic to their acts. "Let us consult," he said, in a constrained voice, "for we are only losing our time in vain words. Have you the slightest idea of the stratagem that was employed to bring Simone to Paris?"

"I only know that M. Philippe was in some way compromised, and that she alone could save him by making great sacrifices."

"Then she has abandoned her fortune to him?"

"I think so."

"Then I understand perfectly. But the marriage?"

"It seems it is as essential to M. Philippe's welfare as the money was."

"And you have no idea who the miserable coward may be who wishes to marry Simone?"

"None whatever."

Raymond little thinking of the spies who might be hanging round about, had raised his voice. He saw nothing that was going on near him. He did not notice that a man of suspicious appearance was smoking his pipe under a doorway close by. "When did you first hear of the marriage?" he asked.

"On the day before yesterday."

"And in what way?"

The poor Englishwoman was on pins and needles. "I declare," she exclaimed, "I don't know what I ought to do or say. My profession has sacred obligations. Certain confidence has been placed in me."

Raymond stamped his foot impatiently. "Tell me at once," he said.

"Well, then, the day before yesterday M. Philippe went out early in a carriage."

"With whom?"

"Alone, sir—and when he came in, about eleven, to breakfast, he was so pale and agitated that I felt, when I met him on the stairs, that something bad was impending. He called his valet, and said to him, 'Go to the duchess and beg her to receive me at once.' I divined that an explanation was about to take place, and I instantly went up to the suite of rooms occupied by Madame de Maillefert, and entered the sitting-room next her bedchamber. Hardly had I got there than I heard M. Philippe talking with his mother. His first words were, 'Are we being abominably fooled!' And then he went on talking so fast that I could scarcely distinguish a word—only here and there disconnected phrases. He said that it was an abuse of confidence; that all was lost; that it was the height of impudence, and that he would blow out his brains. The duchess all the while uttered angry exclamations. I heard her say over and over again, 'It must and shall be done.' She rang her bell, and when one of her maids appeared she dispatched her with a message for Simone to come to her at once. And mademoiselle obeyed; but what took place then I don't know, for they all spoke in whispers. I can only tell you that when my poor young lady left the room she was as white as a lily, and she said to me: 'I am to be married—but I shall not live!'"

Now that Miss Dodge was well started with her tale it was best to allow her to go on until she stopped of herself; but Raymond nevertheless interrupted her.

"You love Simone," he said, "you are really attached to her. Do you wish to save her?"

"Oh! sir——"

"Then take me to her this moment."

Miss Lydia started back, looking at Raymond in absolute horror. "I," she answered,—“I take you to my young lady?"

"Yes."

"To the house, do you mean?"

"Precisely."

"But it is an utter impossibility."

"Nothing is easier. You will take my arm, and we will boldly enter the house. When the servants see me with you they will not ask a question."

"But madame——"

"She is always out at this hour."

"M. Philippe may be there."

Raymond with difficulty repressed a threatening gesture. "If he be there so much the better."

"What are you saying? Great heavens!" replied the poor governess, and she throw up her arms in despair, forgetting the impropriety of such a gesture in the open street. "You are mad!" she exclaimed.

Perhaps she was not far wrong, for Raymond had reached a point when he cared for nothing. "I must see Simone—I intend to see her," he resumed, in that harsh fierce tone which men use in decisive moments, "and there is no time to lose."

"She will not allow you to finish one sentence, She will be displeased by your audacity, and bid you leave her at once."

"Come, Miss Dodge."

But the poor woman rejected the arm which Raymond offered, and

looked as if she were about to fly off. "And what do you think will become of me?" she asked. "My young lady will send me away from her at once."

"Do you prefer she should die?"

"I shall be disgraced."

To discuss this subject would only show the poor woman all the risks she ran. Raymond saw this at once. "Miss Dodge," he said, peremptorily, "take my arm. Time is passing."

Subjugated and losing her head, she obeyed him and took a few steps, but when she reached the open gateway of the house, she hastily withdrew her hand. "I cannot," she cried, "I will not!"

Raymond did not speak. He caught her hand, drew it once more through his arm, and dragged her into the court-yard. Two or three servants looked round with an astonished air. But he went up the steps, and once in the vestibule, he released the poor woman's arm. "Now," he said, "show me where to go."

She no longer made the smallest attempt at resistance. She tottered up the grand staircase, and on the second landing said to Raymond: "Wait here for me; I will go and tell her."

"By no means," answered Raymond. "Go on; I'll follow."

"But——"

"Go on, I say. Would you give her time for reflection?"

More dead than alive she obeyed; and turning into a dark passage she opened the door of a small sitting-room where a lamp was burning. "Mademoiselle," she began.

But Raymond did not allow her to say any more. He pushed her aside, and entered the room.

"It is I!" he exclaimed.

Simone was sitting at a small table, looking through a pile of papers. At the sound of Raymond's voice she started up with such violence that her chair was overturned. She receded to the very wall, with her arms extended. "Raymond," she murmured.

Alas! it was only necessary to look at her to understand Miss Lydia's fears. The poor girl was a mere shadow of herself. Marble was never whiter than her face. Her slender hands were transparent like wax. Nothing was left of her former self except her magnificent eyes. They had all their former clearness, with the addition of pure glitter. The colour at last rose to her cheeks; and having recovered in some measure from her surprise, she exclaimed in a haughty tone: "By what right do you intrude here? You must surely be mad!" and she pointed to the door.

Raymond did not move. "Perhaps I am mad," he answered, with great bitterness. "I am told that you are about to marry."

She looked at him full in the face, and in a voice that did not even tremble, she replied: "And you have been told the truth."

When Raymond entered the house, he still doubted, in spite of what Miss Dodge had told him, and even at this very moment, with Simone's voice ringing in his ear, he had a vague feeling of wonder. He asked himself if he were not dreaming. "I will not allow it!" he cried.

Simone drew her slender figure erect. "By what right will you interfere?" she asked.

"By the right given to me by your love and your promises. Have you forgotten that you said to me, with your head on my heart, 'A girl like myself loves but once in her life. She is the wife of the man she loves, or she dies unmarried.'"

When Miss Dodge had entered the room, she had sank almost fainting on the chair nearest the door. By degrees, however, her senses had come back to her. She was shocked at Raymond's violence, and terrified that he should speak so loud, at the risk of been heard all over the house.

"In the name of heaven, sir!" she exclaimed.

But, with a gesture, Simone stopped her. "Let him speak," she said, "it is only right that not one pang should be spared me!"

But her tone betrayed such agony of suffering that Raymond checked himself, ashamed of his own vehemence. "You will never know what I have endured," he murmured.

"I know that you are inflicting the most useless torture on me, and that it would be more generous on your part to leave me."

"Not until I have spoken, and said what I came to say." With these words he approached her, and in a voice that vibrated with passion, he resumed: "I have come to show you the position in which we both stand. Above all conventional rules, there is the sacred right—the duty which belongs equally to all of God's creatures—of defending their lives and happiness. We have a right to do so. Give me your hand, and leave this house now with me. It is only to obtain your fortune that they clamour for your person. Give them your millions. Money! What is that to us—to you and me? Can I not work and give you a home? Come! If you are not falser than any woman that breathes, you will come."

Simone's serenity was only comparable to that of a martyr, standing, resigned, in the arena, and offering her soul to God while wild beasts tear out her entrails. "My destiny is fixed," she said. "No one in the wide world can change it now. I devote myself to an interest that I regard as superior to my life. Do not be jealous. I have broken no promises, for no other man will ever take me in his arms. Death will hold me in its cold grasp, Raymond. An abyss of shame has opened, and my poor body is needed to fill it up. Do you see now?"

Raymond did not speak. The oppressive silence was only broken by the sobs of poor Miss Dodge.

"Very well," he said, "I will go as soon as you tell me what sacred cause it is, to which you thus sacrifice yourself. I have a right to know and judge it. Do you not sacrifice my life as well as your own?"

"It is a secret that must be buried with me."

Raymond's anger was becoming uncontrollable. "And this is all you will say," he replied. "I have but one thing more to do."

"And what is that?"

"I shall find your brother, and hold him accountable for the horrible wrong he is doing you."

Mademoiselle de Maillefert started forward.

"No—you will not do that?" she said.

"I will do it—so truly as there is a God in heaven. Who will prevent me?"

"I will," said Simone; and she grasped Raymond's hand and pressed it with a strength of which he had not believed her capable. "I will," she repeated, "if my voice has still any power to reach your heart. I will pray to you on my bended knees to relinquish this intention. Would you embitter my dying moments by compelling me to feel that I have sacrificed myself uselessly?"

He did not reply to this question. "At least," he said, "you can tell me the name of the man you are to marry?"

"Would it make any difference to you?" she stammered; "would you be more or less unhappy according to the name of the person I married?"

"I choose to know."

At this moment a voice behind him replied: "Mademoiselle de Maillefert marries the Count de Combelaïne."

With a great start, as if he had received a sword thrust in his back, Raymond turned round, and found himself face to face with the duchess and her son. They had returned home together, and as they came up the stairs they had heard Raymond's ringing voice, and had hurried to the room.

"I repeat," said the duchess, "that my daughter marries Monsieur de Combelaïne."

Raymond had heard her the first time she said this—had heard her only too distinctly—and if he did not speak, it was because words were powerless to express his feelings. "It is a lie!—a disgraceful lie!" he said, at last.

"Ask my sister," said Philippe, with that peculiar motion of the body which amounted in him almost to a nervous affection. This time he shook from head to foot, and his teeth fairly chattered.

Raymond turned to Simone. "Am I to believe your mother?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered feebly but distinctly.

Raymond tottered—the room grew dark to him—and he grasped his head with both hands. "Thou hearest, O God of Love and Mercy! Thou hearest! She consents to become the wife of Combelaïne!—she!—Simone!" Then all at once, blinded by the blood that rushed to his head, he snatched hold of Simone's arm. "Do you know who this man is?" he asked.

"Yes, I know," she replied, faintly.

"Do you know that it is this very man who basely murdered my father, General Delorge?"

Simone sank back in her chair. "You told me all that," she said.

"And you will marry him?"

"Yes."

Dizzy with horror, Raymond stood still for a moment, and then turning to the duchess, said: "And you madame—will you give your daughter to such a man?"

The duchess hesitated. Then: "In families like ours," she replied, "necessities—reasons—often arise which are all paramount. My daughter has told you that it is of her own free will that she devotes herself—"

"Of her own free will!" interrupted Raymond.

Madame de Maillefert stopped him, and in a tone, the sincerity of which struck him even at that moment, she said: "I assure you that if it were in my power to break off this marriage I would do so."

"In your power!" repeated Raymond. And turning to the young duke, he said: "What Madame la Duchesse cannot do you, Monsieur le Duc, the head of this noble house, the depository of the unsullied honour of twenty generations—"

"You heard my mother, sir."

"Madame la Duchesse is a woman, while you are a man. Has the sword bequeathed to you by your ancestors, become so rusty in the scabbard, that you must accept this humiliation?"

"Philippe flushed scarlet. "Sir!" he stammered; "sir——."

"Philippe!" exclaimed the duchess.

"It is true," continued Raymond, with intense sarcasm, "it is true that the Count de Combelaïne is looked upon as a man greatly to be feared. He was once accustomed to the daily use of a sword."

The duke started forward and his glass fell from his eye. "You must account to me for these words, sir!" he cried.

But Simone advanced like a spectre and passed between the two young men. "Not another word, Philippe," she said.

"What! not when I am insulted like that?"

"I wish it. And I have paid dearly enough for the right to express my wishes. And you, Raymond, will admit that it would be unworthy of you to taunt a man who will not answer."

Raymond was silenced. He had begun to notice the extraordinary patience shown by the duchess, and to wonder at it.

"It is not generous, sir," she said gently, "to add to our trials. I understand and feel for your sorrow, and I can excuse it so entirely that I do not even ask you to account for your presence here. Believe me, when I tell you, that we suffer also. But life has inexorable necessities. If it were even to kill us all at one blow this marriage must take place."

"It must take place," repeated the young duke.

Raymond looked drearily round in the room, and in an icy tone, which contrasted strangely with his previous violence, he said: "And I, by all that I hold most sacred in this world—by the memory of my murdered father—assure you that this marriage will never come to pass."

"What do you—what can you hope to do?"

"That is my secret. Only, the solemn oath I have just sworn, you may repeat to Monsieur de Combelaïne. Perhaps it will cause him to reflect."

He knelt beside Simone, who had lost all consciousness. He took both of her hands and kissed them, murmuring some words that were inaudible, and then staggering to his feet he left the room.

VI.

THERE must have been an enormous interest at stake to compel the Duchess de Maillefert, usually so haughty and violent, to the constraint of the last twenty minutes.

"Well!" said Philippe, as Raymond's footsteps died away on the staircase. "Well."

"Well!" answered the duchess. "Did I not warn you that such a scene as this would surely take place? Did you not expect it?"

"And I have been insulted under my own roof by a man whom I could not call to account. Ah! why did I not listen to you?"

Madame de Maillefert sighed impatiently. "It is true," she said, "that we have been trifled with."

"But who would ever have expected such an amount of impudence?" said Philippe. "Let him look out, though, for I have not said my last word."

"True," said the duchess, "you have still some reason to hope. Everything depends on the next few days."

The duke interrupted his mother with a long, irreverent whistle. "Meanwhile M. Delorge will set everything and everybody by the ears," he exclaimed. "Combelaïne is quite capable of believing that he does it at our instigation."

"M. Delorge will not carry his threats into execution."

"You are mistaken, mother. The fellow is simple and sentimental, but he is in deadly earnest."

Miss Dodge, hurrying to Simone's assistance, recalled the duchess to circumspection.

"Hush!" she said, lowering her voice; "Simone will soon change all that. Her empire over M. Delorge is absolute. She will even be able to induce him to leave Paris. Perhaps she had better write to him to come and see her again."

"And if Delorge finds Combelaïne here to-night?"

"He won't, I'm sure. Now go and I will speak to your sister."

But the duchess was wrong. Raymond, on leaving the Maillefert mansion, was a very different man to what he had been on entering it. He understood that De Combelaïne and the De Mailleferts hated each other, as is often the case when booty has to be divided, and so he had arranged a simple plan, which he was determined to carry out with all the *sang-froid* of a man to whom life is utterly valueless. He would go the Count de Combelaïne and say to him: "I love Mademoiselle de Maillefert, and she is utterly indifferent to you. I am beloved by her. She hates you. It is her fortune you want—take it. But as for marrying her, you need not dream of it, for I will blow out your brains first. And I will do it!" Raymond said to himself, "just as I would blow out those of a mad dog!"

While reflecting in this manner he reached the Champs Elysées, and turned his steps towards the charming mansion for which De Combelaïne was indebted to imperial generosity. Raymond rang at the bell, and when the door was opened, he asked: "Is the count at home?"

"No, sir."

"I have come on most important business. I must see him."

The servant had no time to answer, for at this moment an elegant brougham drew up outside, and a lady alighted and went up the steps as if she were at home.

But the servant stepped forward and barred her passage, saying firmly but respectfully: "The count is not at home, madame."

The lady looked at him from head to foot, and replied: "You are new in this house, I see, and probably do not know who I am."

"You are mistaken, madame, I know very well."

"Then move aside, so that I may pass."

"I cannot, madame, for I have received my orders from my master."

"The woman stood in such a position that the light fell on her face. She was one of those persons who are only found in Paris, and who are indebted to incessant care and mysterious secrets of the toilette table for the privilege of prolonging their summer into autumn. She was over thirty. But how much—five, ten, or fifteen years? This question was a difficult one to decide on. However, the more Raymond examined her, the more convinced he was that he had seen her before.

"Call Leonard," she said, in a tone of command.

This was the Count de Combelaïne's confidential servant. "Monsieur Leonard is no longer here, madame," said the servant.

"Leonard not here!"

"No, madame, he has left the count's employment for that of an English lord, who pays him enormous wages."

The lady tore her gloves off her hands in a rage. "Then go you to the count and tell him that I am here—here at his door, waiting."

"But he is out, madame. I swear to you that he is out," the poor man replied. "Just as you drove up, I was telling this gentleman the same."

The lady turned, and as she scanned Raymond she uttered a startled

exclamation. "I will come back," she said. And then addressing Raymond, she added: "Will you have the kindness to assist me to my carriage?"

Raymond complied; and when she had settled herself among her cushions, she said to him in a low voice: "If I am not mistaken, you are M. Raymond Delorge?"

"I am, madame."

"The general's son?"

"Yes."

She hesitated for a moment, and then resumed: "Tell my coachman to drive home by the Champ Elysées, and then take a seat by my side."

Raymond's situation had become so desperate that he was ready for anything. He would even have entered the carriage of his infernal majesty in the mood in which he then found himself. So he obeyed this woman, who, when the door was shut and the carriage had started, said: "You do not know me, I see."

"I am sure you are not unknown to me," he replied. And indeed he had been cudgeling his memory most ineffectually concerning her.

"I must put you on the track, I fear," she remarked. "You have not seen me for years—sixteen or eighteen, perhaps. How time passes! I was then a young woman and you a child. Still my name has been mentioned too often at your mother's for you to have forgotten me, I am sure." But Raymond was by no means enlightened. "In those days your friends—Monsieur Roberjot especially—fancied that I must be able to serve you all. Now do you know? Not yet! Did not the mother of one of your school-friends have a sister?"

Raymond started to his feet so hastily that his hat was crushed against the top of the carriage. "Flora Misri!" he cried.

In a tone of annoyance his companion replied: "I was called so, certainly, some years ago, but now and for some time past my friends have spoken of me as '*Madame Misri*.'"

Raymond stammered forth an excuse, which she quickly interrupted.

"That will do," she said. "If I asked you to take a seat in my carriage it was because I had something to tell you which could not fail to interest you."

"Madame!"

"You need not be so astonished. Without your suspecting it, your interests and mine are the same just now. Listen to me: You have been wishing to marry for the last three months, have you not?"

For the last minute or two Raymond had been expecting a question of this kind, so he was on his guard, and answered in a tolerably cool tone: "That is a difficult question to answer."

"Why dispute about words?" answered Madame Misri, with a frown.

"There has certainly been some talk of your marriage."

"You are right, madame," he replied; for, after all, what was the use of denying it.

"The young lady is rich, I hear."

"Enormously so."

"She is Mademoiselle de Maillefert, I believe?"

Raymond's embarrassment was increased by the darkness which concealed the woman's countenance. There is nothing so trying as a conversation in the dark. The speakers are like two duelists who fight in the dark, sword in hand. He felt certain that she was in a state of rage, and he realized that he was himself in a most critical position, and that every-

thing depended on his prudence and skill. And so measuring each word he uttered, he slowly said: "I certainly had reason to hope that Mademoiselle de Maillefert would be my wife."

"Does she love you?"

"I think so."

"And her family repels you?"

"Absolutely."

"In order that she may marry a man whom she ought to hate?"

"I fear so."

Madame Misri, in her turn, wished she could see Raymond's face; but being unable to do so, she did what would never have occurred to a man. She leaned forward and took his hand. "Do you know the man who proposes to rob you of the woman you love?"

"No," he answered, boldly.

"Why tell this falsehood? You know perfectly well that your rival is Monsieur de Combelaïne."

Raymond did not reply.

"What were you going to see him for?"

Still he did not speak. He fancied he saw a ray of hope in the horizon.

"You meant to quarrel with him," she said—"to challenge him?"

"Monsieur de Combelaïne would not fight with me, madame."

She started. "To be sure. I remember that once you sent your seconds to him, and that he positively refused to meet you. You must hate him?"

"Is it not natural to hate the man who robs me of the girl I love?"

"And that is not all," said Madame Misri, slowly.

"What then?"

"It is said that it was not in a duel that he killed General Delorge."

A cold dew of agony broke out on Raymond's brow. "And are people wrong in saying that?" he asked, in a constrained voice.

It was Madame Misri's turn now to weigh her words; and instead of replying to the question she said: "What would you do to punish this man?"

Thanks to his amazing self-control, Raymond choked down the exclamation of joy which rose to his lips. This woman who spoke to him of vengeance, and who seemed willing to sign a compact of hatred, was Flora Misri, so long the associate and confidante of M. de Combelaïne. To ruin the count, Raymond felt certain this woman had only to lift her little finger. Was she loyal? Could he trust her? "I have but one thought madame," he said, slowly. "I impatiently look forward to the time when I may punish this man."

The brougham had just reached the Arc de Triomphe de l'Etoile, that is to say, the summit of the rising ground, and the coachman drove at a spanking pace down the Avenue de la Reine-Hortense. Noticing this Madame Misri hastily lowered the front window of the carriage. "Turn round," she said to her coachman. "Take the Avenue de l'Impératrice, and walk your horses."

Then turning to Raymond she continued: "You distrust me, Monsieur Delorge? I can see that very plainly. Do not deny it. I am thoroughly well informed. You distrust me because you know that for twenty years I have been the Count de Combelaïne's friend."

Raymond did not speak.

"Know, then," she continued, "that I now hate this man more than you do."

"Madame!"

"Yes; I mean what I say; for I have every reason to hate him. He has deceived me. He has trifled with me. You know his past—you know his relations with me. I was a mere child when I first knew him. He led a most miserable existence. He was flouted by all, respected by none. He lived on his wits, by his sword, and by the gaming-table. But he pleased me. His cynicism frightened me. His impudence dazzled me. I worshipped his very vices. In a short time I became his slave. I thought and felt only as he wished me to think and feel. What days those were! One by one his resources became exhausted, and it was on me that he then depended for his cigars and coffee, and the money he gambled with. If I could not supply his needs he beat me. Why did I remain with him? I did not love him? I hated him; still I stayed."

Was it to give Raymond more confidence that Madame Misri raised the veil from her indignation? "She is sincere," said Raymond to himself.

Meanwhile she continued: "Then came the *coup d'état*, and all at once Combelaïne became quite an important person. How was it that he did not break with me? I fancied it was because he was really attached to me—fool that I was! But he had simply decided that it was his interest not to separate. He has a very long head. He thought this prosperity of his was a fleeting thing, that the day might come when Flora would be again useful to him. He was never able to put any money by. With imperial revenues at his control, he was always embarrassed and always in debt. Millions on millions have passed through his hands, and been lavished on women, play and horses. His friends all say he will end in an alms-house; but I have always thought he would end in the assize court, knowing that when he needs money he will procure it at any cost, and that he hates those who are better off than himself."

Raymond was more and more impressed by this woman's sincerity, but he was anxious to know the cause of her hatred.

"At that time," she said, "I did my best to keep him within bounds. But he would not listen; he simply said, 'Pshaw! While I am ruining myself just you get rich; and when you are a millionaire I will marry you.' He said that so many times that finally the idea did not leave my brain: the thought of being Madame la Comtesse, after being—what I have been—was naturally very agreeable to me. So I began to save, and I was actually miserly. My only happiness was to look at Combelaïne, and say to myself: 'Go on—spend—throw your money to the dogs. My store is growing, and the day is not far off when you will implore me on bended knees to be your wife.'"

One by one all Raymond's doubts had vanished. No art was capable of feigning such anger as Madame Misri's. "Two years elapsed, Monsieur Delorge," she continued, "before I found myself justified in my anticipations. I was right though, for one day Combelaïne had spent his last farthing, and then he thought of me. I saw him come in. His face was very pale and his eyes bloodshot, which with him was a sign of very great emotion. 'You are rich, Flora?' he said. 'I have a million,' I answered. He walked up and down the room several times, and then he came towards me and said: 'Look here—I am drowning—give me half of what you have; it will save me.' I looked him full in the face, and I replied, 'As soon as we are married all I have will be yours.' He jumped three feet. 'You are not in earnest?' he asked. 'Indeed I am.' 'Do you expect me to marry you?' 'Most assuredly.' But here let me tell you, Monsieur Delorge, that in

reality I had no such anticipations. I felt that when my gun was ready it would miss fire. And I was right. 'A woman like you!' he cried. 'What sort of a man are you?' said I. Once upon a time if I had said such a thing, the count would have beaten me black and blue. But as I had money he swallowed his rage. 'Ah! my poor girl,' he went on to say, 'to marry you would be to lead you a most dreadful life.' 'And why?' I asked. 'Because each day would usher in new mortifications. If you were Madame la Comtesse de Combelaïne you would be none the less Flora Misri, and to Flora Misri all doors would be closed.' I had foreseen all these objections. 'My dear,' I said, 'I shall never ask for what is impossible. What you have done for yourself is all I wish you to do for me. You know very well that you have been despised, loathed and condemned, but did anybody tell you so? By no means. You never missed your man on the duelling ground—everybody knew that, and you were treated civilly. For the same reasons folks will treat your wife in the same way, and whomsoever she may be she will be received!' On hearing this, he asked, 'Is that all you have to say?' 'Yes, all. No marriage, no money.' He left the house, calm, to all appearance, but I knew very well that he wanted to strangle me.

"I was beginning to feel a little uneasy at the result of this affair, when his confidential servant came and asked to see me. This fellow Leonard, who has not his equal for shrewdness, had listened at the door and heard the whole conversation. 'Bravo, little one!' he said to me. 'You have netted your prey. Tie the knot while you can, and he is yours.' I knew what Leonard wanted, and so I said to him: 'There will be ten thousand francs for you on the day I become the Countess de Combelaïne.' 'Good!' he cried. 'Count on me, and get your money ready.' All that week Victor—Victor is De Combelaïne, you know—came to see me every evening; and, managed by me and Leonard, he got used to the idea. 'I don't say no,' he remarked at last, 'only you understand that, so far as the public goes, your money ought to be settled on yourself, for I don't propose to pay my creditors with your money.' I was getting on. To put Victor in a good humour I lent him twenty thousand francs. I ordered my wedding outfit, but it was thrown away. One morning I received an envelope containing twenty thousand francs and a note from Victor, in which he said that, as fortune was smiling once more upon him, he should prefer to remain a bachelor. This was at the time of the Mexican war. That same evening I saw Leonard, who exclaimed: 'We are done for, this time. My master has just made an enormous fortune in speculation. His creditors offer him boundless credit. Your day is only put off.' I was raving, as you may believe, and I really fancied I should have a brain fever. Nevertheless, I thought with Leonard that my day would come at last. I determined to double my fortune while Victor was losing his, and I had little difficulty in doing so, through my friends Coutanceau, the banker, and Verdale, the great architect. One of them speculated for me at the Bourse, and the other in land."

Raymond had at first objected to the obscurity; but he now rejoiced at it, for he feared to show the disgust on his countenance, which was inspired by this loathsome story. He could not conceal his anger at the thought that this wretch, Combelaïne, had dared to aspire to the hand of Simone, that high-born maiden. Meanwhile the vehicle had reached the end of the Avenue de l'Impératrice and the coachman, not receiving any orders, turned again; but Madame Misri did not notice it.

With increasing vehemence she began to speak again. "As regards money, the first hundred thousand francs are those that are difficult to

accumulate; and to make a million afterwards is a very simple thing. In less than eighteen months I have done it. One single operation in some houses near the Théâtre Français brought me in four hundred thousand francs. Verdale is a good old soul, and always ready to oblige his friends. In short, I was in the enjoyment of an immense income, when one evening I walked Victor—pale, thin, and harrassed. ‘Not a farthing,’ he said, as he fell into a chair. ‘Not a farthing, and no credit either.’ The fellow had not been near me for more than a year, but Leonard had kept me informed of everything he did. I knew that his immense fortune had again melted in his hands like so much snow, and that he had resumed his old life of shifts and expedients. Lawyers were at his heels—his house was seized, and all his pictures had been sold one after the other. If he retained any vestiges of his past splendour, he owed them to Leonard, who held the horses and carriages in his own name, and to me, who, from time to time had secretly advanced a hundred louis or so, because it did not suit my views that he should fall too low. Seeing him under my roof again, I was, I must admit, considerably disturbed. But, during the two years of his neglect, I had had time to prepare my little revenge, and so with my most lofty air I said: ‘You are ruined, then! You had better blame those friends of yours who gave you the eight hundred thousand francs which induced you to remain a bachelor!’ If a pitcher of cold water had been poured down his back, he could not have made a worse face. ‘And you desert me, too,’ he said, dismally. ‘In all my troubles I thought you, at least, would stick to me.’ He then began to excuse and accuse himself. He said he had behaved like a great rascal, but he loved me, and should always do so. I laughed, and made him a courtesy. ‘Too late, my dear sir!’ I cried.

“He looked utterly confounded, while I went on to say that I had reflected, that I liked my independence, that if I should take it into my head to marry, there were four or five men far better off than he who would give me their names; that my money ought to buy me the title of a duchess, for, thanks to my common sense, I now possessed not one million, but two. On hearing this, he glanced at me in such a way that I was half tempted to ring the bell for my servants to come to my assistance. ‘And you don’t love me;’ he repeated, ‘you don’t love me?’ I did not answer, not that I wished to discourage him entirely, but I thought it was best not to go too fast.

“He knew very well that I had not said all I had to say, and with his own peculiar art he tried to reconquer me. He knows women perfectly well. No honest man would know how to play the comedy he played for a month. I knew he was lying, and yet there were moments when I allowed myself to believe him. At last I yielded to his entreaties, and the day of our marriage was fixed. The press announced, and at his request, you understand, that the Count de Combelaïne was about to marry Madame Flora Misri. Then, in order that he might return to his club, I gave him enough to pay his debts of honour (sixty thousand francs), and I distributed more than that amount among his creditors. All was so well arranged that I was not at all disturbed when, in November, Victor asked me to postpone our marriage until he could succeed in inducing a certain great lady to be present at it. In December he, with Verdale and Maumussy, went off on a journey, to which I did not make the slightest objection. There was a bandage over my eyes, but one morning I received an anonymous letter to this effect:—‘You are very simple, little Flora. Aided by the money you gave him, Combelaïne is paying his addresses to a lady whom he wishes to

marry. He will do this before another month is over. He will marry an heiress as young as you are old, as noble as you are the contrary, adorably pretty, and four times as rich as yourself. This young lady's name is Simone de Maillefert."

Even now, after the lapse of weeks, Madame Misri's voice broke, as she spoke of this letter. "My first idea," she continued, "was that a practical joke had been played upon me. How was it possible for me to believe that a great family would consent to give their heiress to a man like Combelaïne, ruined both in honour and pocket—and utterly used up in short. Finally, doubts began to creep in. I thought of Victor's wonderful skill in transforming himself. I reflected that he was keen and clever to a degree—that even his enemies admitted this. I remembered the journey which he and his friends had taken together, when they had spent several days at the Château de Maillefert. I determined to know the truth, and that night, when I was alone with Victor, I suddenly asked, in an indifferent tone:

"Who is Mademoiselle de Maillefert?"

"I must admit that I never saw a person with such self-command as that man. When his interests are at stake, I really believe that you might put a red-hot iron on the back of his neck and he would not start, but continue to smile. However, he may deceive others, but he can't hoodwink me. I know when he is moved. His moustache quivers, and his ears, which are generally red, turn white. I detected both these symptoms, though he answered me very quietly: 'Mademoiselle de Maillefert is the heiress of the family of that name.' I have not the same gift as Victor, and I had great difficulty in concealing my emotion.

"Do you know this young lady?" I asked. "I have seen her," he said. "Is she pretty?" I asked again. "Well enough," he retorted. "And rich?" I asked. "Passably so. She has an elder brother, and as you know, in most families of importance, the elder son, despite the law, is apt to have the lion's share." Then I inquired: "Do you know this family?" To which he answered: "Not at all." This last falsehood settled the matter. It was now perfectly clear that my dear Victor was doing his very best to betray me, and that if I were not on my guard, he would again escape me, and I should find myself foiled and deserted. "Not if I know myself," I thought."

For some moments Raymond had eagerly waited for a chance to ask a question, and when Flora Misri stopped to draw breath, he laid his hand on her arm. "One word, madame. Have you endeavoured to discover the origin of this anonymous letter?"

"Do you take me for an idiot?"

"And what have you found out?"

"Nothing at all. Combelaïne has so many enemies, you know."

"But, you have kept it?"

"Of course."

"Will you allow me to examine it?"

"Most certainly. To-night, if you choose."

VII.

THE two occupants of the brougham were so absorbed that they did not notice the flight of time. But the coachman on his box did not like the coolness of the evening air, and so he determined to remind his mistress of the hour. He stopped his horse, and opening the front window, without

any ceremony, "Are we never going home?" he asked, in a tone that merited immediate dismissal.

"Not yet," answered Madame Misri; "drive on!"

"Where?"

"Wherever you choose. Along the outer boulevard."

The coachman thereupon vented his ill-humour on the poor horses.

"Until I received that anonymous letter," resumed Madame Misri, "I was perfectly frank with Victor, like the simpleton I am. I promised myself, if he shared his name with me, to divide my money loyally with him, and I felt certain that would delight his soul. But I now made up my mind that if I married him he should never have a farthing! As you may imagine, the desire for revenge made me all the more eager to succeed. I determined to find out something from Verdale and Maumussy, but I threw away my time. The one laughed at me, and the other scoffed. I saw they were in the plot, and that if I insisted, they would tell Combelaïne, who had no idea that I knew anything. I then went to Coutanceau, whom you probably know—the old banker, who is apparently on good terms with Combelaïne, but who, I found, hates him heartily. Coutanceau promised to find out the truth for me. While I was waiting I wrote out a full account of Combelaïne's life. I had this paper copied by a friend, and I sent the pleasing letter to the Duchess de Maillefert, adding at the bottom, 'For further information, apply to Madame Flora Misri, such a street, and such a number.'"

"Good heavens!" thought Raymond, "why did I not come across you the day after my arrival in Paris!"

But Flora allowed him little time for reflection, and it was necessary he should give all his attention to her, for the coachman was driving fast, and many of her words were lost in the rattle of the wheels. "I suppose you wonder why Leonard told me nothing of all this. I confess that at first I was greatly astonished; but, after all, I thought that as he had once betrayed his master to me, he might now betray me to his master? But I did him an injustice, for at my first words he was perfectly aghast. For the first time in his life Combelaïne had kept a secret from his valet. 'Now, then,' exclaimed Leonard, 'we will just prevent this marriage from taking place! Knowing what we know, we shall be great fools if we don't. You work your own way, and I'll go mine.'

"I told him what I had done already. I told him of the letter I had written to the Duchess de Maillefert, whereat he was greatly pleased, and said I had done a good day's work.

"For the next three days I hardly dared put my nose out-of-doors. Each time the bell rang I thought it must be the duchess. But she did not come. I wondered if my revelations had missed their mark, and if her confidence in Combelaïne was unshaken. I feared that my letter had been intercepted. Victor is very cunning, and I thought it quite possible that he had spies at the Maillefert mansion, who would see that nothing reached the duchess without his inspection. He was quite capable of buying the *concierge*, the valets and the maids. I was hesitating as to what step to take next, when Coutanceau called on me one morning. 'I am worn out,' he said, 'for I have been running about for five days playing the detective for your benefit.' 'Have you found out anything?' I asked. 'To be sure I have, and plenty, too,' he replied. 'I dare say, Monsieur Delorge, that you have heard a great many hard things said of Monsieur Coutanceau. He is called a usurer, a skinflint, a robber of the poor, &c. I dare say all this may be

true, but at all events he is the best of the whole band—he is always ready to do a kindness—I mean when it costs him nothing.’ So he began: ‘You have been rightly informed—Combelaïne is to be married almost immediately.’ ‘Not so,’ I answered. ‘He won’t be married without the consent of Madame Flora Misri, and she won’t give it.’ ‘He will marry without it, my child,’ said Coutanceau. ‘Do you think so?’ I rejoined. ‘Do you think if the duchess learns what sort of son-in-law she will have in Combelaïne she will agree to accept him?’ ‘Certainly I do,’ replied Coutanceau. ‘You mean that she will not believe me?’ I retorted. ‘But I can support every statement I made with irrefutable proofs—proofs which have been gathering up for years, and which I have guarded as carefully as my bonds and mortgages. I have papers which would send Combelaïne to the galleys to-morrow.’ Coutanceau shrugged his shoulders. ‘Send him there then, my dear,’ he said; ‘for that is the only way I can see of preventing his marriage!’

“I burst out at this. ‘I mean what I say,’ he replied; ‘the Mailleferts and your Victor are playing a deep game, and they quite agree.’ ‘You are sure of what you say?’ I asked. ‘Certainly,’ he resumed, ‘and I have obtained my information from the young duke himself. You will tell me that I don’t know him; that’s true. I have not spoken to him four times in my life, but I know a woman who has cost him a fortune, and he promised to give her a carriage and pair the day after his sister became the Countess de Combelaïne. As to his creditors, when they beset him for money, he invariably replies that he will pay them when his sister is married. What is to be concluded from this? Simply that the illustrious De Maillefert family, instead of ruining themselves to give the young lady a dowry, expect a fortune from the son-in-law. Coutanceau’s story struck me as almost incredible—I really thought he was laughing at me. ‘Combelaïne with a fortune!’ I cried. ‘Do you tell me such a thing as that! If he needed ten thousand francs to keep his head on his shoulders he wouldn’t know where to get them unless he stole them.’ Thereupon Coutanceau began to whistle, and said, ‘I happen to know that your Combelaïne has opened an account with Verdale. Not longer ago than yesterday I saw the cashier give him thirty-five thousand francs against his simple receipt.’”

Never in his life had Raymond so exerted every faculty of his mind. He was eager to take advantage of this most unexpected chance that had presented itself, and lost all knowledge of time and place. Madame Misri, on her side, was equally oblivious, and continued her lengthy narration:

“I distrusted every one except Coutanceau,” she said. “I knew that he hated Combelaïne, Verdale, and Maumussy. You know Coutanceau staked every farthing he had in the world at the time of the *coup d’état*, and he was called the 2nd December usurer. But this name was really most unjust, for he stipulated for no interest. He simply asked that some position of importance should be given him in case of success. This promise was made. He was told that he could have anything he asked for. But when the time came, Coutanceau’s pretensions were ridiculed. They said he was too old, that his education was inferior, that he lacked prestige, and had no courtliness of manner. The end of it all was that he got no appointment, which enraged him so much that I have heard him say twenty times that he would give all he owned to demolish the Empire he had helped to build. You can readily judge, Monsieur Delorge, that I was glad I could depend on Coutanceau, now that I had determined to punish Combelaïne. So I said to him: ‘Pray tell me more, and don’t keep me in suspense any longer.’ ‘I understand

little one!' he answered; you will just go and repeat everything to Combelaïne.' 'I! Do you think I would denounce you?' I cried. 'I hate him! I loathe him!' Coutanceau looked at me. 'Very well,' he said, 'then I will tell you a little story:

"Once upon a time a beautiful young lady lived in Anjou. She was pretty and good, and lived all alone in a great château. Her name was Simone. This young lady was as rich as the defunct Marquis of Carabas. All the country round about belonged to her. Her property was worth millions, and she took care of her land herself, just like any good old farmer. But the young lady's mother and brother ate up their own fortune, and then they wanted hers. They tried every way to dispossess her, but all in vain, and then they got very angry. However, all at once they had an idea, and that was, to marry Simone to a man who would agree to divide the cake with them—that is to say, the dowry. They were looking about for some such amiable and accommodating youth, when the Duchess de Maumussy proposed the Count de Combelaïne. At a sign from the duchess, Victor left for Anjou with Maumussy and Baron Verdale. He saw these people, and in three days all was settled. Promises were exchanged, and now nothing was wanting but the girl's consent, which was not a very easy thing to procure, as she had a lover whom she wished to marry; but the Duchess de Maumussy was rich in expedients. I don't know exactly what she said or did. I do know, however, that at the end of the year Mademoiselle Simone left her château and came to her mother's house in Paris, and also that everything is now arranged.'"

Innumerable questions surged to Raymond's lips, but Madame Misri would not allow him to speak. "Wait until I have finished!" she cried, in a hoarse voice. "Wait!" And at the memory of all her wrongs, the blood rushed to her head, and the veins in her throat swelled with rage.

"Old Coutanceau," she continued, "had told me all he knew. For an hour I turned him round as I might turn an old glove, and I got nothing more—not one solitary detail—so I dismissed him. I was eager to be alone, so that I might give way to my rage. I am no fool, you understand, and I knew very well that I, Flora Misri, thirty-five years old, could hardly stand against the attractions of a girl of twenty. If she had only been poor! but no, she was rich—so rich that I, with my two millions, was a beggar beside her. Yes, it was clear that I was betrayed. I knew that all hope of aid from the Mailleferts was gone, and I saw that I had only myself to rely upon. I felt, too, that there was no time to waste. So I determined to attack Combelaïne at once. That very evening he appeared about ten o'clock, smoking his cigar, smiling, and as insolent as usual. I had thought over what I should say, but the sight of him made me forget all my fine phrases. I grew very angry, and went straight towards him. 'Coward!' I cried. 'Tell me if it is true that you are going to be married!' If you think he was disconcerted, you are greatly mistaken. He answered very coldly: 'I came to-night to announce my marriage to you.' 'Indeed!' I cried; 'this marriage will never take place.' 'And why, pray?' he asked. 'Because I will not allow it!'"

Madame Misri's voice was raised to such a pitch by this time that the curiosity of the coachman was evidently aroused, and Raymond saw him lean towards the window, as if to see what was going on inside the carriage.

"Victor and I," said Madame Misri, "had certainly had several disputes during the twenty years we had known each other, but never such an one as that evening. 'You say I shall not marry Mademoiselle Simone?' he asked.

'You shall not,' I replied. 'And why, if you please?' he asked again. 'Because you belong to me. Because I, by the sacrifice of my youth, purchased the right to become your wife; because I have your word; because I am tired of being fooled, and finally because I could never endure——' 'Good heavens!' sneered Combelaine; 'do you mean that you are jealous?' 'And why should I not be?' I answered. His face softened. 'You are foolish,' he answered, 'very foolish. Let me tell you that I candidly prefer you, who have been the sunshine of my life, always gay and cheerful, to that lachrymose virgin named Simone de Maillefert. Does she understand me? Do we even speak the same language? This marriage is a sacrifice I make for projects of future ambition and happiness. We are growing old, my poor Flora—we must win comforts for our declining years. Millions are lying in my path, which only need my stooping to pick them up. Ah! if I could only have the money without the woman. But this doesn't seem to be the custom. Let us swallow this bitter pill, Flora; but no jealousy, for that would be the height of absurdity. You don't know this girl. She won't live a year. By that time I shall be free, with an enormous fortune, and a far steadier position than now. Then I will return to you, and bring you, not the title of countess, but that of duchess. Our two fortunes united will enable us to have one of the finest establishments in Paris—and all the world will be at our feet. It is true I do belong to you, but when such great interests are involved, you might lend me for a few weeks to a poor girl to gratify her sick fancy.'

"This is what Victor said to me, not perhaps as I have repeated it, but at greater length, gently and tenderly, with loving voice and eyes. 'I have only four words to say to all this,' I answered, 'and they are, "No, I will not." 'You regard me then, it seems, as your absolute property,' he said, with raised eyebrows. 'Yes,' I cried; and then, utterly distracted, I began to shower insults and epithets upon him. I told him what I knew, and what I suspected of his various infamies. He waited until I had finished, and then said: 'It seems to me that you are presenting your bill.' 'Yes,' I rejoined, 'and I intend to be paid.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'I am tired out with all this nonsense,' he said, 'and I certainly shall not yield to your caprices.' 'Take care, Victor,' I said, 'you forget something!' I went to the chimneypiece, where I could reach the bell before I spoke again. 'What do I forget?' he asked. 'The papers,' I replied. His face became very pale, but he said quietly: 'What papers?'

"I was about to play my last card. 'You know as well as I do,' I replied. 'A man who for twenty years has meddled in every political intrigue is often compelled to keep most dangerous and compromising papers. You were too wise to keep them in your own rooms, where they might be discovered in your absence, if your house was searched, as Father Coutanceau's was, so you intrusted me with all those papers which you regarded as particularly dangerous. You said to me, "Preserve them carefully." So I did; but as I like to know the value of what I have under my charge, I read them.' He had the greatest difficulty in restraining himself. 'Yes, I read them,' I repeated. 'I am stupid, I know, but I can read.' 'And if I asked you to return these papers?' he asked. 'I should say that I should give them to my husband.' 'So that if I marry Mademoiselle Simone——' 'I should utilize them.' 'You!' he exclaimed. I took the bell-rope in my hand. 'Yes, I,' I answered. 'And if you wish to know what I will do, I will tell you. I will classify and arrange them. Some I shall send to one person, others to another, and some to the emperor. One I shall give to my sister,

and others to Madame Delorge. In reference to the last ones, from Berlin, I shall decide later on.' I thought he would turn on me and choke me, but I was much mistaken. He took up his hat, and opening the door, he said: 'You ought to understand that after this I shall never willingly look on your face again. You think you will betray me. We shall see about that.' And then he went away."

Madame Flora laughed a nervous laugh, such as a lunatic might have given vent to, and then she leant towards Raymond. "Well," she asked, "what have you to say now?"

Raymond literally could not speak; he was dazzled by the vista which this woman's bitter desire for vengeance opened before him, and he trembled lest some unwary word of his should recall her to prudence.

"You are astonished at Victor," she said. "What would you be if you knew the contents of the papers in my possession, and where they might place him if I chose to make them known? But he knew me to be as weak as a child, so far as he was concerned, as cowed as a dog that has been whipped and then returns to kiss its master's hand. Many a time I had been tempted to break my chains and fly. Many a time I had threatened to avenge myself for all he had made me suffer. All to no purpose, however, and he unquestionably said to himself when he left me, 'It will be just as it has always been—Flora will never do what she says she will.' But I said to myself, 'Hold your head up in the air, and look as contemptuous as you please. Before the end of the week, not having any letter from me, you will begin to feel uneasy.'

"I felt it was now safe to rest on my laurels, certain that Victor would go no further without another explanation with me. Then, if he persisted, it would be time to act. But so that I might not be taken by surprise, and in order to keep myself informed of Combelaïne's daily acts, I sent for Leonard, who appeared with a rather crestfallen air. 'We have been fooled, madame,' he said, 'my master is certainly going to marry the heiress. 'What!' said I, in spite of us, and in spite of the arms we hold?' 'We cannot prevent it. If the affair could have been broken off the Mailleferts would do so,' he replied. 'What, the people who are in league with him?' I asked. 'They may have been,' said Leonard. 'But they have quarreled now, although they see each other still, visit and go out together; however, there is no love—no liking between them. I know what I say. Only the day before yesterday the young duke appeared at the door and said he must see my master at once. I went to tell my master, who said: 'The deuce take the fool—let him in though!' I went out, but I took good care not to go far—and I listened with all my ears. The two then began to talk, both at once, and such things I never heard gentlemen say to each other—no two rag-pickers could have said worse. Master Philippe asked for some money, which he said my master had stolen—enormous sums in fact! My master said, "So much the worse for you, then! Apply to the courts for redress."

"I hardly knew, Monsieur Delorge, what to make of the account Leonard gave me—but he declared it was true. 'And yet the marriage will not be broken off?' I asked. 'It is more decided on than ever,' he replied. 'But that is nonsense,' I rejoined. Leonard shrugged his shoulders. 'I confess,' he answered, 'that I can't make it out. There is, of course, some devilry of my master's underneath it all. But what? I have worried myself into fiddle-sticks thinking, and now I give it up.'

"The situation became more and more complicated; so that I did not know what to think. I even began to doubt Leonard, and watched him

carefully, wondering if he were not bought over by Victor. 'Perhaps,' I said, at last; 'perhaps the young lady loves some one else!' On hearing this Leonard uttered an exclamation, and went on to say that the poor young lady did love some one. He told me that everyone knew it—and knew you to be the person; and that you would have become her husband if Victor had not been brought forward by Madame de Maumussy. I was struck by this strange fatality, for I at once remembered your father's name, and said to myself: 'That's a man who won't easily let Combelaïne tread on him.'"

Did Madame Misri fancy that it was necessary to add coals to the fire of Raymond's burning hatred before she laid a sure plan of revenge before him? She knew nothing of his resolutions and his desperation when she asked him to enter her brougham; and he had sat by her side, apparently calm and undisturbed by what she had said, though it was strongly calculated to arouse his anger. One great consideration had entailed this reserve and caution upon him. Although he had entire faith in the present sincerity of Madame Misri, he distrusted her in regard to the future. Without having had much experience of passion, he was clever enough to see that in spite of her vehement protestations of hate, Madame Misri still loved the Count de Combelaïne more than ever. She had thrown off her chains, but she might slip them on again and resume her old habits of blind submission. A visit from him, a word, or even a look might prove sufficient. It was, therefore, all the more necessary that he should improve the present occasion and obtain these papers.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"There ended Leonard's information," Flora replied. "But we agreed to remain allies, both pursuing the same end—I openly, and he in secret. And I awaited events, with information from Coutanceau sometimes, and sometimes from Leonard. According to Coutanceau all hope was lost, and I ought to utilize my weapons immediately. According to Leonard, on the contrary, I ought to wait, as he was convinced that Victor and the duke would end their dispute by a duel. Unfortunately, however, things looked to me as if Coutanceau were right. I heard of Combelaïne's marriage on all sides. Everybody was amazed, but still no doubts were expressed. In this extremity, I determined to influence Victor through one of his old friends. Among his papers, I had found those which would frightfully compromise some of the highest persons in the land, and the Duke de Maumussy especially. I addressed him first. After clearly explaining the position of affairs—although he probably knew it as well as I did—I said: 'I cannot attack Victor without attacking you at the same time. I regret this, but it cannot be helped. Use your influence, therefore, not to make him marry me—I do not exact that—but to break off this marriage, which I am resolved to prevent at any cost.' I expected to see Maumussy arrive out of breath, or, at all events, I looked for an immediate answer. Not at all. I then wrote in succession to Verdale and the Princess d'Eljensen. Not a word."

"They laughed at my anger. They mocked at my threats. This was so evident, that I should have felt certain I had over-estimated the importance of my papers if Coutanceau had not examined them and taken advantage of the opportunity to carry away those which concerned himself. He regarded this silence as most extraordinary, and said that it concealed some deep plot. 'Take care!' he said to me over and over again. 'Take care!' And I, who knew better than he did what Victor is capable of, I shuddered with fear. I fancied that everything I ate had a strange taste. I hardly dared

leave the house, and at night time I barricaded my door as if I feared attack. Ah! those horrible papers. Twenty times I put them into envelopes and directed them—twenty times I was horrified at what I had done, and took them out, saying: 'I cannot—no, I cannot.' Then, Monsieur Delorge, do you know what I did? Poor silly fool that I am! I wrote to Victor and asked to see him, saying that our quarrel had risen from a misunderstanding, which could be easily explained."

If Madame Misri thought she should astonish Raymond by this confession she was mistaken, for he had foreseen it, and now congratulated himself on his penetration.

"Yes, I did just that," she resumed, "and in an agony of suspense I waited, but not for long. For that very evening Victor returned my letter unopened. On the outside was written with a red pencil: 'Enough of this, or I shall be obliged to ask the prefect of police to relieve me from threats and demands which are equally ridiculous.' He threatened me with the police! He! What a bitter sarcasm; And I hesitated to expose him! I cried. But I hesitate still, Monsieur Delorge, and this is why you met me to-night at the gate of the Count de Combelaïne's house, for I wished to offer him one last chance of safety—and you heard the answer. He shut his door on me, this man who owes me everything; who has lived at my expense; who has robbed me and ruined me; who owes me the very money which he gives to these footmen who insulted me. And Leonard is no longer there.

"Why, without letting me know, has he suddenly left the count, whom he served for so many years, and who, as he told me but twenty-four hours ago, owes him more than twenty thousand francs? And who is this Englishman who has offered him such fabulous wages?"

Madame Misri paused to draw breath; and then, with convulsive violence, she exclaimed: "My cup is full; his door is shut upon me, and I was asking myself how my vengeance would be swiftest and surest when I saw and recognized you. I have told you all. I am but a woman and do not know how to use the weapons I hold in my hand—they are too heavy for me, possibly. Will you avenge me and yourself at the same time? Are you ready to swear that you will do your best to crush this man?"

Never had Raymond found so much difficulty in retaining his self-control. "Do you mean to say that you will give me these papers?" he asked.

"I will give them to you."

"When?"

Imperceptible as was Flora's indecision, it did not escape Raymond's observation. "To-morrow," she answered; "To-morrow morning."

"And why not to-night?"

"To night?"

"Yes, this very moment. Bid your coachman drive home—take me to your rooms—give me the papers. I will examine them to-night, and to-morrow I will open fire."

A sudden shock interrupted him. The brougham had drawn up in the centre of the Avenue d'Eylau, and the coachman, as before, dropped the glass. "Madame!" he said, anxiously; "madame!"

She, with her thoughts far away, answered him with an impatient command to drive on.

"Very well, madame," he replied; "But I think you ought to know that we are followed."

She started, and instinctively grasped Raymond's arm. "Is it possible?" she exclaimed.

"Yes; I am as sure of it as I am of my life," said the coachman. "Haven't you noticed the queer turns I have made? Well, it was because I wished to find out the truth. I suspected it in the Champs Elysées. Seeing a carriage going in the same direction, and keeping close to us, turn as I turned, to the right, or to the left, I said to myself, 'Somebody is watching madame! Then I drove on, sometimes at a gallop, and sometimes at a walk; the carriage was behind, and now, while I am standing still, that same carriage isn't a hundred feet away.'"

The darkness was too great for the coachman to see the profound effect produced by his report. But while he spoke, Flora clung to Raymond, trembling like a leaf. "Do you hear?" she gasped.

"Perfectly."

"It is Combelaine who is following us."

"Either Combelaine or some one else."

"No—it is he—I know his ways, and the traitor he is! While I was talking with his servant he was hidden behind the curtains. He saw us speak to each other, and then enter my brougham. He asked who you were, and when he was told he jumped into a carriage and started in pursuit."

Raymond felt that victory was escaping his grasp—the victory which he had regarded for the last hour as certain and decisive; for he saw that Flora was frightened at her own audacity, and that nervous prostration had now succeeded her previous excitement.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, "but what of it?"

"What of it! Don't you see that if Combelaine is following us, it is because he is shrewd enough to divine what we mean to do. If he is watching us, it is because he guesses that I have told you everything, offered you the papers, and that we have signed a treaty of revenge."

Raymond did not place complete reliance on the coachman's statement, as he thought it quite possible that the man had invented the tale in his desire to be ordered "home." So he turned to the driver: "Where is the carriage which you say is following us!"

The coachman straightened himself up so as to see the better. "It is just in the same place," he replied, "near a café. The light from the windows is on it now, sir. If you will look out at the back you will see it yourself."

Raymond did so, and about a hundred feet in the rear he distinguished a carriage standing motionless. But what did that prove?

"My good fellow," he said to Madame Misri's servant, "it is not always well to trust to appearances. Drive on while I watch, and take sharp turns and go round enough corners to make the thing certain."

"Very well, sir," and the coachman at once touched up his horse.

"What do you think?" asked Flora, eagerly.

"I think that your man is right. The carriage follows us all the time, turning just as we turn, and carefully keeping the same distance behind us."

When Raymond was perfectly certain, he told the coachman to draw up. "I believe," he said to Flora, "that Combelaine is in that carriage. I mean to make sure of it."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to get out, and go and ask the occupant of the vehicle, no matter whom he may be, by what right he follows us."

He opened the door as he spoke, but Madame Misri grasped him by the arm. "You must not do that," she cried; "I cannot stay here alone. I am afraid. Besides, if it is Victor in the carriage, what will happen?"

Was it for Raymond that she feared, or for De Combelaine? It was hard to decide. At all events, Delorge began to lose his temper.

"What do you want then?" he said, with an oath he was unable to restrain. "Have you any idea?"

"Yes."

"What is it, then?"

"It is this. My horse is tired, I know, but he is a splendid animal, and will do what we want. Let us drive very fast and straight on, keeping on a wide road. The other carriage won't follow us long."

"And after that?"

"After that we will drive back, and I will go home, or spend the night with one of my friends."

This plan offered Raymond the advantage of not leaving Madame Misri, and the prospect of going home with her and getting the papers. "That is a good idea!" he said; and addressing the coachman: "You must get away from that carriage. Take the Avenue de la Grande Armée, then the Avenue de Neuilly, and finally the road to Saint Germain."

"But the horse is tired."

"Never mind! it must be done," said his mistress.

The coachman shrugged his shoulders. "What queer fancy is this!" he muttered, as he whipped up his horse.

"Our spies will have their trouble for nothing," said Raymond.

Madame Misri made no remark. No doubt she was already repenting of what she had done, and would have gladly recalled her confidence could she have done so. Was this fear of Combelaine, or regret at having compromised him? It was difficult to decide. The relations of people like Madame Misri and De Combelaine are not easy to analyze. Passion is often complicated by circumstances which are mysterious and not to be avowed. Their connection was founded on shameful ties, which are really harder to break than those of social force.

"We are not gaining ground!" she murmured.

Raymond looked out; it was true, the other lanterns were at the same distance.

Tears came to Flora's eyes. "Now," she sobbed, at if in answer to the objections in her own mind—"now I understand the silence and security of the count and his friends. They are very powerful, you see, very powerful. They have friends everywhere, and at the prefecture of police more than anywhere else. Since the day I first threatened them, I have been surrounded by spies. I have suspected every servant in my house. Who can say that this very man, my coachman, is not in their employment, and not paid to watch me; and Leonard, he has probably betrayed me. I dare say, Coutanceau himself ridicules me!" And as she spoke she tore her hair, "Now," she continued, "I understand Victor's obstinacy; he knows that if I hand you these papers he is lost, and he determined that you shall not have them. Fool that I have been! Why did I threaten him? Why did I not strike first?"

Raymond saw that this inconsequent, capricious creature was escaping him; but he had not lost all hope. He swore that he would have the papers that very night, even if he were compelled to resort to threats and violence. But he must first of all attend to that confounded carriage. "Stop," he cried; and as Madame Misri drew up, he sprang to the ground.

Madame Misri held him back. "What are you going to do?" she asked. "To see if I can't make your horse go faster than your coachman does."

She dared not oppose him, and, in another minute, Raymond was on the box with the reins in his hand. "Don't be troubled," he called out to Flora, "it will be all right."

But he changed his route. Instead of going along the Avenue de Neuilly, he turned to the left into the Allée de Longchamps, which crosses the Bois de Boulogne diagonally. The other carriage did the same; but Madame Misri's equipage this time made a perceptible advance.

"Another half hour like this and the animal will be foundered," grumbled the coachman.

"We shan't want another half hour," said Raymond, as he extinguished the lamps of the brougham. "That will make it harder work for them," he muttered.

When he reached the spot where the Allée de la Reine Marguerite crosses the Allée de Longchamps, he turned a short corner into a path only intended for foot passengers; and, in spite of the absolute darkness, and at the risk of some great disaster, he kept the horse up to a gallop. At last, however, he suddenly stopped, and for five minutes listened, almost holding his breath. Not a sound, not a light.

"We are all right," cried Raymond, leaping to the ground and throwing open the door of the brougham. But no one answered him. He called again and felt in the darkness. The vehicle was empty. Madame Misri had disappeared.

VIII.

STUPEFIED and yet furious, Raymond could not at first believe in this strange disappearance, and he looked around him incredulously. The coachman laughed as if he would die, and as he rubbed down the quivering flanks of the poor animal with a woollen cloth, he said: "It isn't worth while to look, sir; madame is a good way off, if she is still running."

"Far off! You don't suppose she jumped out while I was driving at that furious rate?"

"Oh! no—madame is not so imprudent. But when you stopped the horse and listened a little while ago, I heard the door of the brougham open and shut softly, and I said to myself, 'what is going on now?'"

Raymond was sorely tempted to thrash the fellow—but what good would it do?

"That's enough," he interrupted. "But what on earth will Madame Misri do here at this hour, and in this darkness?"

"She will get back to town, sir, and very easily, for madame knows the Bois at all hours of the day and night, better than anyone in the world."

"Very well," said Raymond. "Then we will return also."

The coachman was only too glad to hear this decision. In another minute he had relighted the lamps, and as he shut the door, after Raymond had taken his seat, he asked, "Where shall I drive you, sir?"

"To the Boulevard des Italiens, at the corner of the Chaussée d'Antin."

They started, and, half stupefied by the motion of the carriage, Raymond apathetically reviewed the strange events of the evening. What a cruel disappointment! With his hand fairly on the very help he wanted, it had eluded his grasp, and probably for ever. Madame Flora's conduct irritated more than impressed him. In her low cunning he recognized the creature he had suspected—the low-born, debased woman, who was accustomed to

tremble and obey, incapable of open resistance, but always ready to betray and deceive. Where was she?

Once in her own apartments again, would she pack the papers all together and send them to Combelaïne, thus hoping to win his pardon?

"Miserable creature," thought Raymond—"creature without heart or brains!"

Although he had been exceedingly cautious, he had allowed her to see that, if he was ignorant of the precise nature of the intrigue which had placed Simone in the count's power, he at least knew that such an intrigue existed, and that he had made up his mind to battle with it. This was unfortunate, particularly as Raymond remembered Madame Misri's own words: "Such men as Combelaïne should never be threatened. Strike first." And now Combelaïne would be on his guard, and very possibly hurry on his marriage with Simone. In conclusion, Raymond saw that his meeting with Madame Misri had complicated the situation, and done him harm rather than good.

The carriage stopped on the boulevard, and when the coachman threw open the door with the announcement that they had arrived, Raymond gave him a louis, and, alighting from the brougham, stood for a moment uncertain what to do. He had no reason for going to one place rather than another, and he hesitated as to his course, when suddenly he thought of Madame Cornevin, who lived only a few steps off. "I will see her," he said.

Thus, suddenly, without reflection, a man often does a thing which is calculated to have the most serious influence on his life. For months Raymond had seen himself condemned to all sorts of painful dissimulation, in order to conceal the secret of his love for Simone from his mother and his friends, and yet he was now going to reveal it—or, rather, allow it to be divined by the subtle intuition of a woman. One fact dazed and blinded him. Madame Cornevin was Flora Misri's sister: and Madame Cornevin had once exercised a powerful influence over her sister, and had tried to use it when they were seeking Laurent Cornevin, after the death of General Delorge. To be sure, she had then failed. But Flora, at that time, was in all the brilliancy and insolence of youth, and at the age when vice has not lost its gilding. She was intoxicated with the sudden and prodigious fortune of the audacious adventurer with whom she had associated her life, while now—! Old and weary, having drained her cup of bitterness to the very dregs, she might be touched by considerations which then would not have moved her. Was it not possible that she would listen to her sister now, and gladly turn to her for comfort and advice? So Raymond simply intended to say to Madame Cornevin: "I know that Madame Flora Misri has important papers in her hands belonging to the Count de Combelaïne. If we could get hold of them, the wretch would be in our power. We should hold the proofs of his infamy, of his intrigues, and crimes. My father and your husband would be avenged. See your sister, and try to obtain them from her."

It was with these ideas that Raymond hurried along the *Chaussée d'Antin*. It was late; the shops were closed, the passers-by were few in number, and even the cafés were shutting. Raymond had eaten nothing since morning, but he was not aware of it. He was in that state when physical needs are dormant, and over-exerted nerves suffice for all. It was as he feared—Madame Cornevin had retired. "At least, I suppose so," said the concierge, "for all the workwomen went away very early to-night."

No matter! Raymond climbed the stairs, and rang a sharp, imperative peal at the bell. No answer—no one came.

But as he leaned against one of the windows on the landing, he saw a light which he knew must come from Madame Cornevin's bedroom. She was not asleep then. He rang a second time; then a third. He had about decided to abandon the attempt when he heard footsteps approaching. And from behind the door sounded a voice: "Who is there?"

"I—Raymond Delorge."

The door instantly opened. Madame Cornevin stood there with a candle in her hand. "What is the matter?" she exclaimed; "is there anyone ill at your house?"

"No one, thank Heaven, madame."

She was pale and agitated, as any man less absorbed than Raymond would have instantly seen. And with that volubility which one ordinarily adopts when embarrassed, she said: "Pray forgive me for keeping you waiting so long; but I sent my workwomen away at six, my servant and my daughters have retired, and I was just going to bed myself."

She was, however, dressed as carefully as when she received her customers during the day time.

"I must say a few words to you," interrupted Raymond.

"To-night."

"Yes—at once—respecting a very important matter."

Madame Cornevin's embarrassment became so great that he noticed it. "I fear that I am giving you a great deal of trouble," he said.

"No, indeed," she answered. "You give me no more trouble—disturb me no more when you come here than Jean and Léon would. Come in—come in!"

He followed her; but instead of showing him, as usual, into her own parlour, she took him into the work-room. Placing her candle on the table, she sank on to a chair, and, with ill-conceived impatience, exclaimed, "I am listening."

Raymond's observation was aroused. Her manner was certainly peculiar. However, he gave her in rapid words a clear and accurate account of the events of the evening, but omitting any hint of his interest in Simone, and attributing his hatred of Combelaine entirely to the old enmity. He expected that Madame Cornevin would make some objections. However, she simply said: "Very well. I will see my sister to-morrow before noon."

"And when shall I know the result of your step?"

"Come to-morrow night at this same hour."

This was more than Raymond had hoped. "I have something else to ask, madame."

"And what is that?"

"I must beg you not to mention to my mother that I have seen you."

"I will keep your secret."

When a person is in a hurry to get rid of an unwelcome guest, his or her answers are apt to be summary. Raymond was aware of this, and strange conjectures flitted through his mind. Just then he felt certain that he heard a chair moved in the next room. "If we had these papers," he said.

"Yes, it would be a great help," answered Madame Cornevin, quickly rising as she spoke.

This was such a positive request for him to withdraw, that Raymond dared not linger. "To-morrow evening, then?" he said, as he turned to the door.

"Yes," said Madame Cornevin—"yes; that is understood."

And she took up her candle and preceded Raymond on to the landing. Hardly had his foot touched the stairs than he heard the door close again. If any other woman had been in question Raymond would have been forced to the most singular suspicions. Misconduct is confined to no age among women; but Madame Cornevin's reputation had never been breathed upon. "And yet," he said to himself, "her agitation was apparent, and she literally put me out-of-doors. What was that noise I heard? Was she not alone? Not alone! Who could have been at that hour in a room occupied by her three daughters? Who could she have an interest in concealing? Her husband, Laurent Cornevin?" As this idea flashed through his mind, Raymond started. "And why not?" he said to himself. "Laurent Cornevin is a man of prodigious courage, but he is human all the same. Who could say that in some moment of profound discouragement he has not revealed himself to his wife, and that he sometimes comes to visit her in secret?"

The more Raymond thought of this, the more convinced he became of the correctness of his supposition. He was almost tempted to rush back, ring until she opened the door, and then say to her: "Your husband is here—I must speak to him. My happiness and my life depend on it." If he were right, Madame Cornevin would not have the presence of mind to contradict him. Yes, but if he were mistaken? "Clearly," he muttered, "clearly I cannot risk that!" But, as he walked along, he said to himself: "To-morrow, when I go to see her again, I shall be very unfortunate or very stupid if I don't get hold of something which will confirm or dispel this idea."

It was past midnight when he entered his mother's presence, for with his sister she was waiting for him. "I have been very anxious," said Madame Delorge, "for Monsieur Roberjot told me this very evening that a determined resistance is to be made against the empire. Do your duty, my son, but be very prudent; remember that you will be especially watched—and think of the triumph it will be for our enemies if you furnish them with an excuse for involving you in trouble."

He reassured his mother, and bade her good-night. His sister murmured, as he kissed her: "Poor Raymond! Why will you not trust me?"

The fatigues of this harassing day had one good result—they brought him slumber. He slept until ten o'clock, when he was awakened by old Krauss coming in with two letters. At the sight of one of them Raymond started for he recognized Simone's writing. His hands trembled to that degree, that it was almost impossible for him to break the seal.

This is what he read at last: "I had lost all consciousness of what was going on about me, when, as my mother said, you broke out into violent denunciations of the Count de Combeldaine. I must repeat to you, therefore, my best and only friend, what I have already said—that any violence at this hour will render all that I have suffered utterly useless, and at the same time, do no good. I have taken it upon myself to promise the Duchess de Maillefert that you will resign yourself to our sad fate. It is a horrible sacrifice, I know; but it is on my knees that I ask for it, and in the name of the Past. Will you refuse me? Am I wrong in my reliance on your affection? Answer me.

SIMONE."

Hot tears, as burning as molten lead, fell from Raymond's eyes. "She has been compelled to write!" he muttered. "And how am I to reply to these prayers dictated by her relatives?"

The other letter was from the Society of the Friends of Justice—which he had neglected for some time: “Be at the Rue des Cinq-Moulins, at Montmartre to-night at nine o’clock, without fail. Matters of the highest importance will be brought before the Society.” Then followed the forms only known by members of the Society, and which guaranteed the authenticity of all documents.

Nine o’clock! and it was at eleven that Raymond was to be at Madame Cornevin’s. “Nevertheless, I will go,” he said to himself. And at half-past eight he started.

The weather was foggy, and the pavements covered with mud. The outer boulevards presented their usual animated appearance at that hour of the evening. The cafés and taverns were crowded, and the rattle and clink of glasses could be heard. Groups of young men and women passed by, laughing and talking loudly, and grisettes wrapped in cloaks hurried to a rendezvous or a ball. Then came a drunken man. Alas! Raymond was tempted to envy this drunken man, for he was weary of the state of perpetual anxiety in which his life was spent.

“At this very moment,” he thought, “according to Madame Cornevin’s success or failure with Flora Misri, my last chance is assured or it has escaped me altogether.”

His mind was so absorbed in this idea that he had paid little attention to the summons of his secret society. It only recurred to him on reaching the house, which he found to be lighted up. He gave the pass-word to the “brother” who mounted guard at the door, and then went up the stairs. About fifteen “Friends of Justice” were already assembled, and one of them, a physician—a stout, ruddy faced man, better known by his advanced opinions than by his medical attainments—was drawing in forcible language an exact picture, as he swore, of the moral and material state of Paris. After this orator came another, who with a dozen journals open in his hand, undertook to prove that the Provinces only awaited a signal from Paris to rise in a body and put an end to the imperial *regime*. Immediately two other members started up to announce their wishes and opinions. They disputed; and their words became so sharp that the chairman called them both to order.

Thereupon Raymond requested permission to say a few words. “Citizens,” he began, “allow me to remind you that it is nearly ten o’clock, and that it is time to bring forward the important matters which have called us together.”

“What matters?” asked the chairman in surprise.

“Why those respecting which I was summoned here.”

“Summoned!”

“Yes, this morning—by a letter.”

Every face was turned toward the chairman, whose countenance evinced considerable astonishment. “You received a letter?” he said to Raymond; “and from whom?”

“I thought it was from you, sir,” said Raymond, as drawing it from his pocket, he added: “Here it is!”

Not a word was spoken after the chairman took the letter. He began by examining the paper, the seal and post-mark, after which he looked at the writing. “This is amazing!” he exclaimed. Twenty questions were addressed to him from every part of the room, but he did not answer any of them. “There has been no communication sent for days,” he continued. “Neither I, nor the secretary, nor a member of the committee has written.”

“No one!”

"And yet you have received a letter which presents every indication of having been sent from me. These are all my private signs."

The chairman handed the letter to the person next to him. It circulated from hand to hand, and everybody muttered in turn: "Incredible! I should have been taken in myself."

"Yes; so would everybody," cried the chairman, "and that is the worst feature in the case!"

It was not necessary for him to say this, for every one understood him.

"Where does this letter come from?" he continued. "Is it a joke? I don't think so. Is there a traitor among us who has written it? If so, what could be his motive? Must we consider it as the work of the police?"

This last word fell on the assembly like a shower-bath. Faces became pale, and glances were turned to the doors and windows as if in search of a means of escape. More than one Friend of Justice fancied he already heard the doors of his prison cell creak on its hinges. "The police," continued the chairman, "has apparently discovered the existence of our association. To many of us that means exile or imprisonment. But let us look at this more closely. Why should the police write this letter?"

This question was the signal for a violent discussion. Some of the members insisted that their plans should be more speedily put into execution, others proposing that the society should be dissolved until a more propitious season. At midnight the assembly had resolved on nothing, except that they would call a general meeting at once. Two members were then sent out to reconnoitre, and returned to say that there were no suspicious signs to be detected. Then one by one the members filed out, Raymond among the last, just as the clock was striking one.

The night was very dark, and, seen through the fog, the street lamps were no brighter than lighted cigar tips. Raymond knew it would simply be folly to look around him, to try and ascertain if he were followed, and he did not think of it for a moment. He had far more reasons for alarm than his political friends had, as he was well aware. He recognized Combelaïne's treacherous hand in this last blow. And a presentiment told him that this letter concealed a snare. What did his enemies now propose to do? To get rid of him probably. After Flora Misri's confidences, he had become too dangerous not to trouble the slumber of all these scoundrels. What, then, would be more simple than to arrest him "in the very act"—that is, at the place where the secret society met—to sentence and dispatch him to Cayenne?

His knowledge of the circumstances imposed on him certain obligations which he was too honest to evade. Before the meeting broke up he had told his political friends all he could to put them on the right track, but without imparting to them secrets which were not his own. However, they paid little attention to his words, for he was a very unimportant member of the society; and they thought him rather conceited to imagine that the police had concocted this false letter for himself alone. So little did they attend to his remarks that no one offered to accompany him home.

But he did not dream of danger. As he walked along the outer boulevard, now silent and deserted, he only thought of Madame Cornevin, who had been expecting him, and of the suspense she would endure until he could with decency present himself in the morning. He had just reached the end of the Boulevard de la Chapelle, when two or three men ran hastily past him. He hardly noticed them, being still absorbed in wonder as to the result of Madame Cornevin's application to her sister. Of course a great deal depended on what Flora Misri had done after her flight. Had she seen the

Count de Combelaïne either that night, or in the morning? If she had, there was not a vestige of hope. If she had not, then all depended on Madame Cornevin's tact.

He was walking slowly, when about midway down the Boulevard Rochechouart he heard some moans. They seemed to come from a bench a few steps off. He peered through the darkness, and fancied he could see a black mass on the ground. He hesitated, and then moved on as the moans grew louder.

The most ordinary prudence enjoined him to observe great caution; for every Parisian knows this to be a common device of scoundrels to get their victims into their power. But Raymond was not prudent. He advanced until he found himself standing over a man who seemed to be in terrible convulsions. Moved by pity, he stooped down.

And at the same moment a terrible blow, such a blow as a butcher would fell an ox with, struck him on his neck, at the base of his head. A hair's breadth higher and he would have been killed. But he was only partially stunned, and a moment later he shouted "Help! Help!"

The summons to the secret society was now explained. He knew that he was trapped. Only those who have seen death so near can ever know the world of thoughts which surged through his brain in that brief moment. "Poor mother!" he murmured, thinking of the unhappy woman who was waiting for his return at that very moment, and who at dawn would receive his body. Then Simone's name escaped his lips. In his pocket there was a letter from her, the last he had received. He knew that it would be found and read, and that it would perhaps compromise her, or at all events warrant her being summoned as a witness. So he took the letter and conveyed it to his lips, intending to swallow it.

This was the last act he was conscious of. Three men surrounded him, and he was unable to defend himself, for he was dizzy from the terrible blow he had received. "Help!" he cried once more. But at the same moment he received a thrust from the blade of a knife between his shoulders. A mortal chill seemed to strike his heart, and he fell, stiff and unconscious, face downwards, on the ground.

When his senses came back he found himself in an unknown place, stretched out on the billiard table of a café. A man about his own age was leaning over him examining his wound with the dexterity of a medical practitioner.

Two other men were curiously watching the process, while the waiter of the café, in his white apron, held the candle to afford the doctor the light he required. Near a table, moreover, a stout little woman was tearing an old napkin into strips.

Raymond saw all this as if in a dream, and so indistinctly that his eyes closed again. The first idea he was conscious of was one of wonder that he was still living. If, as he believed, he had been assailed by the Count de Combelaïne's paid assassins, how was it that the miscreants had not finished him? Had they learned their trade so poorly that they had believed him dead? He did not know the gravity of his wound, but he felt quite certain that his life was not in danger. He heard the physician say, moreover, as he put on the bandages, "He will be on his feet again in less than a month."

Raymond felt very thankful on hearing this, and with a mighty effort he asked to be told what had happened. He was then informed that the café was called the Café de Péricle's, and was kept by a worthy Prussian, Justus

Putzenhofer, with the assistance of his wife and a cousin named Adonis. The gentlemen who had come to his aid were the habitués of this café, Dr. Valentin Legris, M. Rivet, a merchant in the neighbourhood, and an enthusiastic journalist, M. Aristide Peyrolas. These three gentlemen, indifferent to police regulations, were finishing their game of whist, when they heard a shout for help, which is not an agreeable sound after midnight on the outer boulevards. They rushed out at once, but they were too late to prevent the crime, as Raymond already lay on the ground; and they could hear the flying feet of the assassins far down the street.

Raymond listened in silent wonder. Could it be, after all, that he had been attacked by ordinary thieves? He asked to have his clothes examined, and found that his watch and pocket-book were gone. He had been robbed! Did it therefore follow that the assassins were not in the pay of M. de Combelaïne and his friends? By no means. For it is the A B C of the spadassini's profession to rob the man who is killed, in order to lead investigation astray.

Then Raymond remembered the men who had run past him. They had gone on undoubtedly to prepare their ambush. But his certainty as to their character was not absolute—and so he murmured aloud: "Were they really robbers?"

This was not much to say—but it was enough to arouse the attention of a quick-witted person like Dr. Legris. So, when Raymond had given an account of what had happened, the doctor remarked, in a tone which was too easy and careless to be altogether natural: "You will have to say all this before a commissary of police."

"No, indeed!" exclaimed Raymond; "by no means!"

And, in fact, how could he file a complaint—and against whom? To provoke an inquiry without naming Combelaïne, would be simply to put the investigators off the track. To give Combelaïne's name would involve the Duchess de Maillefert, her son, and even Simone herself—and at the same time provoke the Duke de Maumussy, M. Verdale, and Flora Misri. Then again, one of the first questions addressed to Raymond would be: "Where did you pass the evening? Where were you coming from?" To name the Rue des Cinq Moulins would be simply betraying the Friends of Justice. And that the police knew and watched over this association was proved by this forged letter, which could only have been procured through some traitor's aid. All these considerations presented themselves with relentless logic to Raymond's mind. And so, in the tone with which a man asks an enormous favour, he entreated his rescuers to keep this attack, of which he had been the victim, absolutely secret.

It was asking a great deal, particularly without giving any explanation. Every one, however, followed the example of Dr. Legris, and promised silence and secrecy. Then Raymond breathed more freely; and after giving his name and address, and a promise to call at the café as soon as he was better, he started to leave. He got on his clothes without much difficulty; but when he attempted to stand, he tottered and would have fallen but for the doctor's assistance. "I must have a cab," he said.

At all hours of the night cabs are to be found on the outer boulevards, going back to their stables or to the railway stations. Adonis went out, and soon returned with one, the driver of which was tempted by the promise of a large gratuity.

When Raymond was installed on the cushions, the doctor insisted on going with him, saying that he could not allow him to go off alone in such

a state. Raymond would not have submitted to this from any other person, but he was attracted by the physician's face, which was both keen and frank in expression ; and besides, he felt that he needed him. He was determined to conceal his misadventure from his mother, and he proposed to feign a cold or lumbago. But if he were obliged to remain in bed for some days, who would take care of him? Dr. Legris was the very man, of course. As to the rest, he could trust in old Krauss.

This was all settled in his mind when the cab stopped at his mother's door. The air and increasing fever lent him certain strength which he knew would be needed to prevent his mother feeling any alarm. He excused himself to the doctor for not inviting him to come in, for at that hour it would have disturbed Madame Delorge. "The banisters will help me up," he said.

He then shook hands with the doctor, and entered the house. But it is one thing to drag one's legs over a level surface and another to climb stairs, as Raymond quickly found out. However he set his teeth firmly, and although the pain was atrocious, he succeeded. Fortunately old Krauss was alone, and when he saw Raymond, whiter than a spectre, with his disordered garments covered with mud, advancing towards him, he lifted his arms to heaven, and, in a husky voice, exclaimed, "Wounded!"

Faint and exhausted from the exertions he had made, Raymond could only nod.

"By Combelaïne or Maumussy?" asked the old servant.

"By their people, probably."

The old man took his young master in his arms, and carried him rather than helped him to his room; and then as he undressed him, he said:

"Your coat is wet with blood, and your overcoat too; both have been cut through by a knife. You were struck in the back, then. I know the handiwork of the villains who killed my general." But when he discovered that the wound had been dressed—"Ah! you have seen a doctor," he exclaimed. "Yes, and a good one; the bandage is put on as it ought to be. Our own surgeon in my time couldn't have done better."

Raymond was obliged to ask him not to talk any more. "Hide my clothes," he said, "and when my mother is up in the morning, tell her I came in very tired, and that I need rest. But mind you come to me at nine o'clock, whether I am asleep or awake. I have a letter to send to Madame Cornevin. It is a secret which I confide to you, and you are not to speak of it to anyone. Now go. You see this wound is nothing."

His wound, it is true, presented no bad symptoms; but it was painful enough to prevent him from closing his eyes all night. He lay thinking, and in the silence and darkness he applied all his penetration to analyse this last event. How dared Combelaïne, this prudent, cunning man, resort to an attack of this nature in the public streets of Paris? It was certainly a most decisive step to take, and an efficacious one, so far as disposing of an enemy went, but it left a most uncomfortable piece of evidence—the body—behind. Moreover, it required accomplices, who, in nine cases out of ten, turn on the instigator, and expose the plot. "It must be," concluded Raymond, "that his situation, which I believed impregnable, is really horribly compromised—that he knows himself to be on the verge of ruin."

And it was at this moment that Raymond saw himself down on his bed, and for a week, at the least, prevented from acting. What could not Combelaïne achieve during these days of security—particularly if he had prepared

everything for a rapid denouement? A week! Why in that time he could marry Simone, and Raymond could not oppose it, as he had sworn to do, even by violence, even by crime. A cold perspiration broke out on his forehead at this frightful thought, and, fever doing its work, a slight delirium set in, and he seemed to see the Duchess de Maumussy, Madame de Maillefert, Baron Verdale, and Flora Misri all bending over him with sneers and laughs.

When Krauss entered the room in the morning, Raymond was sleeping quietly; but, true to his word, the old soldier awoke his master. "I told madame that you had a severe cold, and that you would remain in bed, you thought. How do you feel?"

Raymond was suffering intensely. He said, however, that he was better, and told Krauss to give him a pencil and paper. He wrote to Madame Cornevin as follows:—"An unforeseen circumstance, and one quite independent of my will, prevented me, dear madame, from keeping the engagement which you were kind enough to allow me to make with you. To-day I am kept in my bed by an attack of lumbago, so that it is impossible for me to go and see you to ask for the result of your application to Madame —. Pray let me know it without delay. You can easily imagine the suspense in which I am. I rely on your promise to keep the secret. It is now more indispensable than ever. R."

He folded and sealed this letter. "Krauss," he said, "I wish you would find an excuse for going to Madame Cornevin's."

"Oh! that's easy enough. I have to take back some patterns which she sent to my young lady."

"Very well—then you can easily manage so that no one shall see you give her this letter. Wait for an answer; and, Krauss, make all possible dispatch."

Krauss still lingered. "I think, sir, I ought to say one thing to you."

"And what is that?"

"Last night, about midnight, a man, in a blouse—a big fellow—with a fresh coloured face, came to the concierge, and asked if you were in. He said he was one of your old workmen."

"What did the concierge say?"

"That you were out, of course. The man seemed very much annoyed, and said he would call again. And about one o'clock he came to the door. The concierge had gone to bed. He pulled the cord, and in a minute more heard a voice call out, 'Well, has he come in?' The concierge flew into a rage. 'Bless my soul!' he cried, 'is this an hour to come here after any of our people? No, Monsieur Delorge has not come in, and you had better take yourself off!' Upon which the man decamped." Raymond listened attentively. "In my opinion," resumed Krauss, shaking his head gravely—"in my opinion, that animal was a spy—an accomplice of the fellows who attacked you."

"Very possibly," said Raymond, although he thought precisely the contrary.

By the light of recent events he clearly saw that two intrigues were going on about him. For some time he had been quite certain that he was watched and followed. He had also decided that the surveillance was double. One watcher had saved his life at Neuilly and La Villette; the other had prepared the snare into which he had fallen on the Boulevard Rochechouart. Combelaïne managed one of these surveillances. But the other? Who could pay for that except Laurent Cornevin? And in his

own heart he believed that the man who had incurred the wrath of the concierge by inquiring for him was Laurent himself, and, moreover, that it was he who had been with Madame Cornevin. "He expected me," thought Raymond, "and, knowing the immense interest I had in being punctual, he was astonished at not seeing me at the appointed hour, and so he came here to find out about me."

All this seemed so plausible that he said to Krauss, hastily, "Give me that letter again."

And the old soldier having done so, Raymond hastily wrote a postscript. "I know," he said, "the cause of your trouble the last time I saw you. In the name of Heaven confide in me!"

Whether he was right or wrong in his conjectures, he could see no harm in writing as he did. But the tedium of waiting was dreadful. Krauss certainly could not have arrived at his destination when Raymond began to expect him back, and said to himself, "Deuce take the old fellow! He ought to be here by now."

Suddenly a slight noise was heard. It was his mother, who cautiously opened the door and looked in.

"I am not asleep!" he exclaimed.

She thereupon came to his bedside and stood looking at him. "How pale you are!" she said. "I think it would be best to send for a physician."

"By no means," he answered decidedly. "I shall be on my feet again in three days."

Madame Delorge shook her head. "Do as you think best," she answered simply. But she said this in such a tone that Raymond was troubled to the very depths of his soul.

For the first time the suspicion occurred to him that his mother was not deceived, and that if she chose to appear so, it was out of that delicacy which mothers often evince. What did she think then, however? But he could read nothing in her face, which had quickly resumed its ordinary calmness of expression.

"Remember, my dear boy," she said, as she kissed his brow, "that I have no other reliance than you in this world, and that all my hopes rest upon you."

With his sister Pauline, Raymond found that he must be still more on his guard. She looked at him so keenly that he turned away his head, "Is it politics," she asked, "that have made you ill?" Fortunately, she was called, and hastily departed, leaving Raymond in a state of excessive irritation.

Dr. Legris was ushered in at this moment. "Well! How are you?" he said, when he reached Raymond's bedside.

"I am in absolute agony."

The door was shut, so that there was no imprudence in speaking like this. "Is it your wound?" asked Dr. Legris.

"What else should it be, pray?"

The doctor did not reply directly. "It is difficult to understand," he said, as if uttering an axiom of general utility, "the precise influence which the mind has over wounds."

From any other person Raymond would not have accepted this infliction very calmly, but Dr. Legris had already inspired him with that confidence which precedes friendship.

"What wouldn't I give to be able to rise!" he sighed.

"You must not think of such a thing," answered the doctor, imperiously, "under five or six days—and not even then, possibly."

He had seated himself, and begun to write a prescription, when the door suddenly opened, and Krauss appeared. The old soldier, taking it for granted that his master was alone, had drawn a letter from his pocket, but he quickly thrust it back on seeing a stranger. "Did you not ring, sir?" he asked, anxious to find an excuse for his appearance.

"No," answered Raymond, "I did not ring, but you come just in season. This gentleman is a friend and a physician, and he will tell you what you are to do for me."

The doctor was acute enough to see that he was in the way, and so in a very few minutes he departed. As soon as he had gone, Raymond exclaimed: "Did you give my letter to Madame Cornevin?"

"As soon as I was alone with her," said Krauss.

"Did she read it in your presence?"

"Yes."

"And how did she look while she read it?"

From the glance that the old soldier gave his master, it was clear that he had an idea in his head. "At the beginning," he answered, "she was just the same as usual, but all at once she started."

"You are sure of it?"

"Certain—and she turned as white as a sheet."

"But she said nothing?"

"No; she only drew a long breath, and looked round as if she were frightened. Then she wrote this answer."

Raymond thought no more of his wound. He snatched hold of the letter, and turned it over and over, hesitating to open it, as he felt certain that it contained words which would influence his whole destiny:—"Faithful to my promise, dear Raymond," wrote Madame Cornevin, "I went to Madame Misri's yesterday, at nine o'clock. I found her in despair, sobbing and tearing her hair. She had just returned home, having spent the night with one of her friends. During her absence all the papers in her possession had been stolen. My visit was useless, and so I withdrew. Yours faithfully.—J. CORNEVIN."

"P.S.—I do not understand your strange postscript. What do you mean? There was no trouble but yours the other night, my poor child!"

One by one Raymond had seen all the hopes he cherished fade away. He had come to regard misfortune as the law of his life. So this letter did not surprise him. "She distrusts me," he thought. But his opinion was in no degree changed, and he felt more than ever convinced that Laurent was with his wife. But why should Madame Cornevin distrust him? Might it not be that her husband had dictated this reply—and if so, why should he persist in this impenetrable incognito? What terrible revenge was he maturing for all his wrongs?

These preoccupations at first rendered Raymond oblivious of the intelligence that Flora Misri's papers were stolen. The thief, of course, was De Combelaïne. And yet, if he had obtained possession of these dangerous documents, why should he have had recourse to the assistance of assassins? "I shall see Madame Cornevin on Sunday, at last," sighed Raymond, worn out by thinking, "and I will make her explain herself."

Vain project. For the first time for eighteen years Madame Cornevin failed to spend Sunday with Madame Delorge. "She is afraid of me," said Raymond, "which shows me I am correct in my suspicions. Good heavens! how long must I lie here?"

It was not until six days had elapsed that Legris ceased his professional visits and came as a friend. It was clear that the sharp-eyed doctor had scented a mystery, and that he would have been happy to solve it. But Raymond did not care about this. After so many years of absolute solitude, he experienced a feeling of positive relief in the companionship of a man of his own age—of a man who was evidently so superior in all respects—whose practical good sense was apparent in all he did, and who had that peculiar experience of life in general, and of Paris in particular, to be acquired in the medical profession. The hour which M. Legris spent every day by Raymond's bedside was the most agreeable of the twenty-four to our young hero—the only one, in fact, in which he was in the least relieved of his own affairs and melancholy thoughts. All the rest of the day was inexpressibly weary. And yet everybody seemed to believe in the reality of the ailment he professed, and both Roberjot and Ducoudray paid him such constant visits that he was rarely left alone. Through M. Ducoudray he heard all the gossip of Paris, while M. Roberjot acquainted him with all the details of Pierre Bonaparte's affair.

But Raymond listened with an inattentive ear. What did he care for Prince Pierre? What were politics to him? It was to the Maillefert mansion that his thoughts had flown. What was going on there? What had become of the quarrel which had seemed on the point of occurring between Philippe and the Count de Combeldine? Whom could he trust to make enquiries? He thought of sending Krauss, and then of Dr. Legris. Should he send one of them to Miss Lydia Dodge? Would she not refuse to receive them? Or, if they succeeded in reaching her, would she not refuse to speak? Raymond at last became anxious about the apartment he had taken in the name of Paul de Lespéran. Would not the concierge begin to gossip if his absence lasted any longer?

In this way the days passed on. On Wednesday Raymond sat up for a few hours. On Saturday he was up all day. On Sunday he had at last decided to go out, when Krauss appeared with a letter which had just been left. The dirty envelope, the writing, the orthography, the ink, and the words written across the corner, "Personal and Immediate," all bespoke the anonymous letter, the most cowardly, shameful, disgusting weapon that can be used. Raymond was on the point of throwing it into the fire. But he suddenly remembered that he was not in a position to neglect anything, and so he broke the seal.

It was, indeed, an anonymous letter. An unknown individual, who signed himself a friend, begged him to go that same night, at midnight, to the ball at La Reine Blanche. There a man would accost him and take him to a place where a scene which he ought to view would take place. "It is a mere mystification," murmured Raymond, as he crushed the letter in his hand and flung it on the floor.

But five minutes had not elapsed before he asked himself if he were not hasty in his decision. He picked up the letter, smoothed it out; and read it again. He noticed one strange point which at first had escaped his observation, but which now struck him with astonishment. The person who gave him the rendezvous at La Reine Blanche, said, "I come from the Garden of the Elysée." Was it mere chance which had caused this terribly significant phrase in the letter? And some lines further on: "If Monsieur Delorge is not willing to do this for his own sake, he will do it for her's." She—who could she be, if it were not Simone de Maillefert? Raymond must indeed have been an utter simpleton not to see that the person who

wrote this letter was thoroughly acquainted with his life, with all his sorrows, his hatred, and love. And to whom among all those who knew his life could he attribute this anonymous letter if not to Combeldaine? Yes, to Combeldaine or to Laurent Cornevin. If it were Laurent, Raymond had everything to hope. But if it came from the Count de Combeldaine, he had everything to fear. "No matter," he said, "I will go."

And yet, was it not, in his present state of weakness, an act of the most absolute temerity to go alone into the lion's den? But who could accompany him? There was no one but Krauss. "And why not Dr. Legris?" said the young fellow with a start. And indeed, when the doctor came in, Raymond, without the slightest preamble, handed him the letter to read.

The doctor was at first absolutely stupefied, but presently expressed his opinion that this was a snare. Raymond admitted that such had been his own idea. He said, however, that he was fully determined to go to La Reine-Blanche, and to go alone, if need be. The doctor accepted this indirect invitation, and it was all the more meritorious on his part as no explanation was given him. Raymond and M. Legris accordingly repaired to the ball-room, where they were at last approached by a man who, having pronounced the words, "I come from the Garden of the Elysée," bade them follow him.

They did so. They were introduced into the Montmartre Cemetery, and by the light of the moon they witnessed that strange scene, in which five persons—four men and a woman, whom the others called Madame la Duchesse—audaciously scaled the walls of the burial-ground and violated a grave to ascertain if a coffin were empty! The watchers' guide abandoned them and fled, and all their efforts to find him and compel him to give an explanation of his conduct utterly failed, so that they remained face to face with an absolutely startling problem.

Never had Dr. Legris' curiosity been so highly excited. But subtle as was his penetration, he was so entirely ignorant of Raymond's antecedents, that he had no basis on which to found any conclusions. Besides, had he known anything of Raymond's past, it is doubtful if the knowledge would have been of use to him. Indeed it was in vain that Raymond himself tried to connect this scene in the cemetery with any circumstance in his life.

However, he felt that he had no right to ask the assistance of Dr. Legris without explaining the whole situation. Accepting the services of a friend in this way was to incur certain tacit obligations. Raymond now, more than ever, realized how useful a friend could be to him as the hour of the dénouement gradually approached. So he begged the doctor to come and dine with him at his mother's that night, adding that they would talk afterwards, and that he would open his whole heart.

Part VI.

LAURENT CORNEVIN.

I.

DR. VALENTIN LEGRIS was not of those gay students who, after years of beer and absinthe, carry off their diplomas through sheer audacity of good luck. Sprung from a poor family—his father had been a carpenter—Dr. Legris owed his modest position entirely to his own intelligence and industry.

He had been irregularly educated in various directions—at one time at a school which clothed and fed him on the express condition that he would win the state prizes at the end of the year ; and he was usher in another establishment at the time he took his bachelor's degree. The next year he made enough by giving lessons to buy a few books, and pay for his entrance fee at the medical school. He often suffered ; for young fools round about him, kept in idle luxury by their wealthy families, regarded poverty as a crime, or as a folly worthy of ridicule. But he was not of the stuff that is seriously affected by such things, or by jests anent the shabbiness of his boots and the old-fashioned cut of his coat. His natural gaiety was not embittered ; it was simply sharpened to that point of sceptical irony which becomes men who realize their own value, and who intend to scale all obstacles in their path.

He could never be induced to affect a pedantic gravity far from his natural character, nor to find an element of success in patient hypocrisy, like others. He was not adverse to pleasure, and he proved it whenever, by some lucky chance, a few unexpected gold pieces fell into his hands. Several of his professors considered him too independent, and even went so far as to reproach him for evincing at times a spirit of contradiction and insubordination. His examination was none the less a triumph, however, and one of so brilliant a nature that the faculty looked forward to great things from him in the future. Unfortunately, his diploma did not bring him a large income ; and after receiving this parchment, he found himself as often as before face to face with the dismal problem of how to live.

For weeks his life was very hard. He could be seen then with a care-worn brow and lingering step, wandering about in the halls of the medical school, or standing in front of the panel, which hangs on the right on entering, and bears mention of all applications and offers. On one side was the advertisement of a ship about to sail for the Polar Seas, and wanting a surgeon ; that of a rich foreigner, old and sick, who desired the exclusive care of a competent physician ; that of a country village, where the old practitioner had just died, and which took this means of making its wants known. On the other side there were five, ten, fifteen young men, who, with diplomas, but without money, offered to accompany some young and interesting invalid to Italy, or even to give advice in the back shop of some apothecary.

"People must have food, you know." This was what Dr. Legris said to himself more and more bitterly each day, and he had almost decided to apply for the ship and the Polar Seas, where at least he should sit down at table twice a-day, when one of his comrades presented him to the celebrated

English physician, Harvey. Dr. Harvey was then residing in Paris for the winter, and had just issued his famous work on poisons. He needed an assistant, and took a great fancy to the young medical student. At the end of a year, Dr. Harvey had become so much attached to him, indeed, that he made him an offer to accompany him to London, with an assurance that he would answer for his future.

Although Legris was profoundly touched by this kindness, he refused the offer, and was installed a few months later as nurse-surgeon at the Paris hospital of La Pitié. The years that then elapsed were monotonous, but interesting ones. He brought to his work, and to the exercise of his profession, all that passionate obstinacy which alone makes a man superior. He expended all his energy in struggles against illness, suffering, and death; and displayed alike a sagacity and fecundity of resources and a boldness and patience which astonished the oldest practitioners. This was no reason why all these men should be his friends, and yet they were so. They knew him to be poor, and they took every opportunity of calling him in for consultation, and also sent him patients whenever it was possible.

Never did the celebrated Professor B——meet a difficult or obstinate case in his practice without calling in his assistant. This situation under one of the shining lights of science brought Dr. Legris into relation with a great many persons. Some of these connections were simple and agreeable; others were flattering; again, others were important enough to be of use to him whenever he left La Pitié. It was in this way he became acquainted with the Duke de Maumussy, when the latter thought he had been poisoned in 1866; with the Princess d'Eljonsen, when she was thrown from her carriage at the races; and with Madame Verdale, after that famous ball given by the baron, when the poor woman was so cruelly burned by a fire that broke out in the midst of the entertainment.

But as Dr. Legris' friends said, he did not possess the faculty of utilizing these people. The fact was, he did not care to do so. One of those all-absorbing passions, which the wisest of men cannot control, had taken possession of him. He had fallen in love with a young girl of the working classes, and she trifled with him. He was poor, and she coveted toilettes, diamonds, and carriages; all the brutal splendour which torments the brains of poor girls and speedily leads them to the prison of Saint Lazare or the hospital. However, the doctor loved her, and he struggled to give her what she desired. So his existence during the last few months he spent at the hospital was a perfect hell. Still he bore everything until positive knowledge of her infidelity was forced upon him—and then he broke with her. He had saved a little money, and with this he established himself at Montmartre, on the Place du Théâtre. In less than six months his practice was larger than he could attend to. It was not an especially lucrative one, no doubt, but still it was amply sufficient for his needs.

Toil and time did their work, and by degrees he recovered from the shock he had experienced; the past faded away, his old ambition resumed its sway, and he determined, as soon as he had saved a few thousand francs, to establish himself in central Paris. Such, then, was the man in whom Raymond, in his extreme distress, had decided to confide without restriction.

On taking leave, young Delorge had said: "To-night at six o'clock," and as he returned to the Rue Blanche he discovered a thousand reasons for applauding his resolution. This time, thanks to Krauss, Madame Delorge was ignorant that her son had passed the night out of doors, and

so she received him as usual. "I have taken the liberty, dear mother," he said, as he embraced her, "to invite one of my friends to dinner, and I beg of you to receive him cordially."

It was the first time since his return to Paris that he had introduced a guest to the house, and so his mother evinced a little surprise. "Do I know this friend?" she asked.

"I think not, my dear mother, but he is an extremely clever person; some four or five years older than myself—Dr. Legris."

"You never spoke of him to me," said Madame Delorge, as she rang the bell. "But that makes no difference; if he is your friend, it is quite sufficient. And as he is a physician, he is probably something of an epicure. I must interview Françoise in order to give him a good dinner."

Françoise was the cook. She soon appeared, and while Madame Delorge gave her orders, Mademoiselle Pauline approached her brother, and fixing her eyes on him, said: "Is not this Dr. Legris the gentleman who came to see you every day while you were in bed?"

"Precisely."

"Then—I understand."

"And what, pray?"

"I understand what the cold was which confined you to your bed, and why it was so promptly cured."

"Raymond concealed his impatience. "How exasperating this little girl is!" he thought, at the same time feeling somewhat mortified at being caught in his falsehood. However, he replied aloud: "Is it so extraordinary that one of my friends, who is a physician, should come and see me when I'm ill?" He rose as he said this to leave the room.

"Are you going?" exclaimed her sister.

"I am busy."

But as he reached the door she said: "What! not one moment longer? We have great news for you."

"News?"

"Yes; of Jean." Raymond looked at his sister, and detected a strange tremor in her voice. "This morning," she continued, "Madame Cornevin received a long letter from her son."

"Which she came to read to you?"

"Oh, no! she sent it. She has so much work to do, and is so busy, that it was impossible for her to get away from her workroom for an hour."

Raymond's suspicions quickened. "Poor Madame Cornevin," he said, in a low voice, "must be indeed crushed by work. On Sunday she could not come to dine with us—she was not here yesterday—and to-day she deprives herself of the pleasure of reading a letter from Jean. Don't you think this a little singular?"

Pauline coloured. "No, it does not strike me as singular," she said.

"You know, then, what important matters detain her?"

"Certainly. Is not this the gayest season of the year? Isn't to-morrow Shrove Tuesday? Are there not ball-dresses, fancy costumes, and the like to be made?" Pauline's blushes grew deeper as she spoke; her mother had heard her last words.

"I am sure," she interposed, "that Julia"—for she now always spoke of Madame Cornevin by her Christian name—"has a great deal to do; and yet I am a little surprised that she has not been able to find an hour to spend with us all the week."

Raymond shook his head, while watching his sister out of the corner of

his eye. He thought that it was himself that Madame Cornevin avoided, and that Pauline certainly suspected something. "I kept Jean's letter," continued Madame Delorge, "for you to see, my son."

This letter, as Raymond knew in advance, would give him no information. He was right; for Jean, faithful to this decision, breathed not one word of his journey, nor of his discoveries, nor of his father. He spoke of M. Pécheira, but only as a charming man, as a friend whose acquaintance he had made in Melbourne, and who had shown him all that was worth seeing there. He concluded by saying that his passage for Liverpool was taken on board a vessel which would leave Melbourne three weeks after the one which carried this letter.

"And so," said Raymond to his mother, as he handed her back the letter, "we may hope to see our traveller at almost any moment. He may not perhaps come for a month, but at the same time he may walk in to-morrow morning."

"You forget that he is on board a sailing vessel," said Pauline.

Raymond looked at her in astonishment. "How do you know that Jean took passage in a sailing vessel?" he asked.

She burst out laughing, with that nervous little laugh which sounds almost like a cough, and which is the resource of women in embarrassment. "Does he not say so in his letter?" she rejoined.

"No; he says nothing of the kind."

She shrugged her shoulders, and remarked, with feigned carelessness: "I must have dreamed it, then!"

Madame Delorge might be deceived by this remark, but Raymond was not. "Ah! ah!" he thought; "my sister is in direct communication with Master Jean."

But he was not displeased by this discovery, so constant and close was the intimacy between the two families. Only, if Jean had been in communication with Pauline since his departure, she had unquestionably been informed of all that had been hidden with such infinite care from her mother and Madame Cornevin. A man of twenty-five has no secrets from the woman he loves. This discovery gave Raymond a clue to the singular conduct of his sister—to the significant manner in which she spoke, and to her entreaties that he should trust in her. "It is clear," he thought, "that she knows all I know of Laurent Cornevin's existence!"

But this was no time to question Pauline. It was late, he was worn out with fatigue, and Dr. Legris might come earlier than was expected. So he took refuge in his little study, and had not been there very long lying on the sofa before he fell asleep, and dreamed that his dear doctor was sitting by him.

Dr. Legris, however, was at that moment in his own apartment, where he was hurrying through a consultation—hurrying through is the expression to use. He was not by any means naturally amiable, but his patients had never seen him in this exasperated, impatient mood. The fact is, that he knew himself to be expected in the Rue Blanche at six o'clock, and he not only had eight or ten visits to make, but he was eager to find himself alone for ten minutes, that he might reflect on the strange events which were about to interfere with the monotony of his life. "Yes," he thought, "this is certainly a most extraordinary story; for if any one had told me yesterday that it was possible for such an event as I witnessed in that cemetery to happen in the city of Paris, in the year 1870, in the midst of a great army of guardians and policemen, I should have laughed aloud!"

With all his anxiety and preoccupation, it was wonderful that the doctor, as he attended to patient after patient, was able to retain all his keen medical perception and *sang-froid*; but thanks to what Professor Bechat once called "the habits of the profession," he certainly succeeded in doing so. When the last visit was accomplished he uttered a sigh of relief, and dressed in haste to drive to the Rue Blanche.

Dr. Legris pleased Madame Delorge at first sight—and Madame Delorge was not easily pleased. She found him, as she told her son the next day, both acute and frank, which is a rare thing, as acuteness almost always precludes frankness. As for the doctor, he was struck by the distinguished bearing of Madame Delorge, and by Pauline's surprising beauty. The dinner, however, would not have been very cheerful had not the doctor possessed that precious faculty which allows a man to lay aside his most pressing and harassing cares, just as he lays aside his cigar on entering a drawing-room. He had seen too much and with too observant eyes for his conversation to be deficient of that delicate savour which is only imparted by a full knowledge of Parisian life. He wished to please and be pleased, so that considerable time elapsed after the dinner, and coffee had long since been served, when Raymond rose and said: "We are forgetting our business, dear doctor. Come, my mother and sister will excuse you."

And a moment later they were seated in Raymond's study, before a good fire, with the doors closed. The doctor had lighted his cigar and ensconced himself in a comfortable chair in front of the portrait of General Delorge, which puzzled him so much whenever he looked at that sword with its scabbard sealed with large red seals, and hanging right across the canvas.

This was the time selected by Raymond to disclose the history of his life to his new friend. At table, while Dr. Legris had talked to the ladies, Raymond had had time to reflect and decide how to condense this tale. His narrative was therefore remarkably clear, and yet precise enough not to leave out a single detail of any value. And when at last it was completed, he said: "Now, doctor, you know my life as thoroughly as I know it myself! and you are far better able than I to judge if my game be not irretrievably lost, and if it is not utter folly for me to continue to hope and keep up this contest any longer."

Dr. Legris did not reply immediately, but smoked on in silence until his cigar was exhausted. That he was thunderstruck was clear. He had expected something strange, but this exceeded his conjectures. His thoughts then flew back to himself. He remembered that he, too, had loved; that he, too, had had his days of despair and distrust, and yet what a difference there was between the unhappy passion which had blasted his life and the pure and noble love which he had just heard spoken of!

As Raymond spoke again he started, and in a voice that quivered with emotion, he said: "Upon my life, my dear Delorge, in my opinion, your position has never been better. I honestly believe that you have never been so near success."

After the events of the last few days and such a succession of disappointments, these words fell on Raymond's ears almost like mockery. "Doctor," he said reproachfully, "doctor!"

But Legris answered: "It is not my usual habit to preach optimism, but what have I to do with a result which is still in the future? A man of brain and heart must act as if he had everything to expect, and console himself if he fails as if he had never had anything to hope! It is Maistre who said that."

He rose as he spoke, and approaching the chimney-piece remained standing. His eyes flashed fire, and every feature bespoke energy and manly strength. He looked as he appeared at times at the bed-side of some patient suddenly struck down by a terrible malady, and on whom he felt he ought to try some heroic remedy. And after all was this not a consultation? "My dear Delorge," he cried, "we will give your enemies the rope with which they will hang themselves, I trust. They may instead of that, crush us—of course I admit this possibility—but we will show fight all the same!"

If fear be contagious, assurance is none the less so. On hearing the doctor express himself in this way, Raymond's courage and hopes rose fast.

"To begin with," said Dr. Legris, "who is the author, the instigator of this mysterious and altogether abominable intrigue which has taken Mademoiselle Simone from you, and by which it is proposed to give her to a scoundrel like Combelaine? The facts are patent to the most ordinary intelligence; the instigator is the Duchess de Maumussy."

"I am certain of that."

"And so am I. Had she any interest in preventing your marriage? Evidently, and the most natural, and at the same time the most powerful in the world. You pleased her and she was rash enough to allow you to see it."

Raymond coloured. "I am not a conceited man," he muttered; "and it is a most painful thing for me to say—but——"

The doctor smiled. "I am aware," he said, "that a man is always supposed to occupy a ridiculous position when a woman loves him like that—in spite of himself. But here the fact is clear, and is not to be got over. And you—how did you reply to her significant advances? Like a simpleton, like an honest man as you are. A different man would have managed this dear duchess. He would have recognized the necessity of so doing, and would have soon managed her as he pleased. But the past is past. You are not aware, perhaps, that I have the pleasure of knowing this lady."

Raymond looked amazed. "You know Madame de Maumussy?" he asked.

"Indeed I do, though I am as yet but a little way up the ladder of medical fame." And, lighting a cigar, Legris continued: "When Monsieur de Maumussy fancied he had taken poison, which was about two years ago, I spent, I may say, some three weeks in his bed-room. Persuaded that some people wished his death, so that they might get possession of certain documents relating to the *coup d'état*, documents that he had steadily declined to give up—this noble person was literally dying of fear. He was frightfully afraid of poison, and thought he should find it even in plain boiled eggs. My especial duty was to examine every dish that was sent in. When he saw that I partook of them, and yet lived through that experience, he ventured to taste them himself—often before a mirror, to see if he turned pale, and with his hand on his stomach ready to ask me for an emetic at the slightest suspicion of colic. In the beginning I admit that the duke's terror and talk amused me, but at the end of four days I had become weary, more weary than I can tell you, and I should have deserted at once, had I not been as poor as Job, and if my dear and respected master had not stipulated that I should receive five louis per day. On account of this money I remained in the house; and merely to amuse myself I began to study the Duchess de Maumussy."

"She was quite as much bored with all these proceedings as myself."

Still she never left the little parlour next her husband's room; she took care of him, and tasted his food, but she never ceased laughing at him, and telling him that after all a man can die but once, to which he replied, 'that might be, but he should like to make it as late as possible.' She had never seen me before—I was not one of her acquaintances, but she felt the necessity of talking—and then you know a physician is of no consequence. She simply thought aloud in my presence, and let me here assure you that she thought some very strange things. She astonished even me—and yet I had received many strange confidences in my time. When she talked to me of her beauty, of that rare and almost fatal beauty you know of, she frightened me. It was, she said, an exceptional power that had been given to her, and which she should not deserve, if she did not use it to achieve some great end—or even some crime—according to the occasion. Also to turn the heads of fools, or simply to please the man who should please her. I never saw the shadow of a scruple about her, but under all her languid grace I divined a soul of fire, and the eccentric imagination of an opium smoker. My dear fellow, this is the woman who loved you madly enough to throw herself at your head. So you can draw your own conclusions as to her feelings towards you when you disdained her, and towards Mademoiselle Simone, whom you preferred."

Raymond was silent! Was this not almost precisely what the baron had said to him so long ago? "Then," continued the doctor, "it is to Madame de Maumussy that we must attribute this plan of Mademoiselle Simone's marriage, and the choice of the husband also. Does not this very choice betray the hatred of a woman who believes herself scorned? Who in fact did she choose? A scoundrel utterly without honour or reputation. The man whom she loathes and despises more than any other man in the world—Combelaïne himself."

Of this last point Raymond was utterly ignorant. "Do you mean," he exclaimed, "that the Duchess de Maumussy dislikes Combelaïne?"

"She told me so," answered the doctor with emphasis. "She told me so over and over again, and she also told me why. Do you know that it was the Count de Combelaïne whom the Duke de Maumussy suspected of trying to poison him?"

"Is it possible?"

"And the duke himself openly spoke of his suspicions."

"Oh!"

"And he bade me increase my watchfulness on the days that Combelaïne entered the room."

"But do you mean that he dared to come?"

"Most certainly."

"And was received?"

"Of course. How could De Maumussy and De Combelaïne afford to come to an open rupture?—two men who had been so closely connected—two such friends! It would have been scandalous."

Raymond was confounded.

"Then you can see that to make her vengeance all the more sure the duchess precisely chose this man. The difficulty was to induce Mademoiselle Simone to marry him—to give him her hand and fortune. Madame de Maillefert at first failed in the accomplishment of the task, but Madame de Maumussy determined to succeed."

Raymond started up. "Yes," he exclaimed, "she succeeded! And how? That is just what I want to know."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. "After all," he said, "what does it matter? We know that they made Mademoiselle Simone believe, in some way or another, that this marriage alone could save the honour of the illustrious house of Maillefert. That is all we need to know at present. Now let us see what happened next. At first De Combelaïne and the Mailleferts, mother and son, were dazzled with their good luck, and consequently were much pleased with each other. When they came to the question of dividing the spoils, however, there was a change. According to what you have been told, the Mailleferts have been fooled, and I must confess that I am not surprised. Now, they would like to break off this marriage, but it is impossible. Combelaïne wishes it—and Combelaïne is master of the situation."

The doctor began to grow a little excited. He was as yet only conjecturing on these points, but he seemed to discern the light which announced the truth as Aurora heralds the dawn. "Yes," he resumed, "Combelaïne holds the young duke in some way, and through him the duchess. You can do nothing against him. He has, I am convinced, very little fear of Flora Misri. Besides, he will do his best to hasten a marriage which will give him, the tarnished adventurer, an assured position as a member of one of the oldest families in the kingdom, as well as the possession of immense wealth. However, Combelaïne is not as completely victorious as we have been led to believe. Between him and the object at which he aims there is some obstacle, which as yet is hidden from us; of this I am convinced. He knows something that we don't."

"But I will know!" exclaimed Raymond; "I will find out!"

"I shall not look for it," said the doctor, gaily, "for the obstacle, I am certain, is none other than Laurent Cornevin."

The conclusion was perhaps erroneous, but it was so logical that Raymond could not contradict it. "In that case," he said, "Combelaïne is aware of the existence of Laurent and his presence in Paris."

"Perhaps," answered the doctor, slowly, "And then, after a moment or two of reflection, he continued: 'I am certain that Combelaïne knows of the existence of some enemy, and a powerful one, too, who is lurking in ambush ready to profit by the slightest mistake he may make, to pounce upon him. Adventurers like himself, whose existence is a perpetual defiance to society, have always a sixth sense which warns them of danger. He has felt the earth tremble under his feet. This valet who has served him so long—who has been his confidant, and his accomplice in many of his infamous schemes—what has become of him? How could he leave a master who owed him so much money? Madame Misri herself could not understand it. Neither can I. And who is this Englishman who gave him such fabulous wages? May not this Englishman be a Frenchman like you and me? May he not have made a fortune in Australia? The letters that Madame Misri possessed have been stolen. By whom? It is by no means certain that it was by Combelaïne. It seems to me that if he had these famous letters in his possession—these papers which are so compromising—he would never have tried to murder you, Raymond Delorge, the other night.'"

Raymond had been duped by all these hopes and illusions too often to be much exhilarated by his friend's words. "Do you mean to say"—he said speaking very slowly—"that you believe the person who carried off Flora Misri's papers to be Laurent Cornevin?"

"That is precisely what I mean."

"But how could he know of their existence? How——"

Dr. Legris stopped his friend with a gesture. "You forget," he said,

"this valet who possessed all Combelaïne's and Flora's secrets. This Leonard—do you think that it was only yesterday that he was bought by the Englishman whom I choose to call Laurent?"

Raymond was as if struck by lightning. "Merciful heavens?" he cried, "that would be indeed our salvation. Do you know, doctor, that Madame Misri told me that these papers would not only ruin Combelaïne, but also his accomplices Maumussy, Verdale, and the Princess d'Eljonsen?" But a sudden reflection chilled his enthusiasm. "If Monsieur de Combelaïne knows nothing of Laurent's existence," he asked, "who can he suppose has taken the papers?"

"Why, you, of course!"

"That is to say, he believes me to be the inexorable enemy who crosses his path all the time, and defeats his combinations?"

"Precisely."

"Then this would explain the assassination?"

"And also why you are surrounded by spies, my dear friend, and why Laurent watches over you."

Thus it was that the doctor answered all the objections made to his theory.

"And yet," resumed Raymond, "one thing which passes my comprehension is, why Laurent should so persistently avoid me."

Legris smiled. "But I understand it very well," he replied. "Let us see. Has not Laurent every reason for turning the attention of these people, whom he wishes to attack, on you? If they believe you to be their only enemy, is he not free to carry out his plans. While they watch you, Laurent watches them. Were he to consent to see you, and to combine his plans with yours, twenty-four hours would not elapse before they discovered his identity."

Leaving Raymond to meditate on these words, Dr. Legris slowly drank a cup of tea, which had just been brought in by Krauss. After which, lighting another cigar, which he smoked contemplatively, he continued expounding his theories as follows:

"Now," he said, "let us look at our adventure in the cemetery. Let us try to find the author of that anonymous letter. Is it Combelaïne? No, certainly not. It was through a forgery that we entered the cemetery, and Combelaïne would not have been compelled to resort to any such means. With one word to the Prefect, he would have been able to obtain any permits he desired, and would not have used the forged ones which our guide had. The conclusion is therefore inevitable. It was Laurent Cornevin who wrote the letter, and it was one of his agents who joined us at La Reine-Blanche. But he left us most treacherously, you say? Certainly, and that was because Laurent was determined to avoid you."

"I see!"

"Now then, we have to ask who the people are that we saw climb over the cemetery wall and violate the tomb of Marie Sidonie. Were they Combelaïne's people? No; for it was clear they were in connivance with our guide. So the man, who appeared to us to be a man of the world, was an agent of Cornevin's, if not Cornevin himself."

Raymond caught his breath. "But the woman," he exclaimed, "who was the woman whom the others called 'Madame la Duchesse?'"

"I must confess," answered Legris, "that I did not recognize the Duchess de Maumussy; but, of course, this woman, who ever she was, disguised herself as far as in her power, for an expedition like that; so we have

no means of judging who she might be from her appearance. The next point is to ascertain the meaning of this scene, that escaped me utterly, and I am not ashamed to say so. I can discover nothing in your past which seems to have the smallest connection with this violation of a grave, and yet you were summoned in such a way that it is evident your presence was regarded as indispensable. Cornevin is not a man to take such a step without an adequate motive; for, as I said before, I feel certain that he was the author of the anonymous letter. Again: this letter said, 'Come for her sake, if not for your own.' The 'her' could, of course, only refer to Mademoiselle Simone. So the conclusion is inevitable that the woman we did not recognize was the Duchess de Maillefert."

Raymond's face lighted up with hope. Was Fate weary at last? he wondered. But the doctor was buried in thought, and his contracted brows indicated that his reflections were not altogether pleasing in character. "Softly—softly!" he said at last; "we won't shout victory just yet;" and as Raymond was about to speak, he added: "I see one black spot on the horizon. You are, I think you said, a member of a secret society?"

"Yes; and I was returning from one of its meetings when I was attacked."

"Precisely; and what did your friends think of the forged summons you had received?"

"It disturbed them very much."

"Do they know what happened to you on your return home?"

"I wrote to them the next day."

"And then?"

"Our chairman came to ask me all the particulars, which I gave, but without mentioning the name of De Maillefert, which would have been saying that I attributed the forgery to the Count de Combelaïne."

"And what did the chairman say?"

"That as it was a personal enmity he was reassured. Still to guard against the police having penetrated our secret, he had deemed it advisable to take immediate measures to change the place of meeting as well as the pass-words and signals."

"These people are simpletons," answered Legris impatiently. "Haven't they yet learned that these conspiracies are the very best traps which the government can possibly have for the people they find inconvenient? If the government had no other enemies than these it would last for centuries." Then suddenly he added: "And that, my dear fellow, is your great danger. Your secret society is Combelaïne's great weapon against you. As soon as he is ready to use it, he will."

"What can he do?"

"Only send you to Cayenne."

"True," answered Raymond. "But what can I do?"

"You can conceal yourself."

"My dear doctor!"

"It is the word that repels you. Call it disappearance, then, if you like that better, and do it to-night or to-morrow. What prevents you? Your mother? Not at all, for you have only to tell her that you believe the police to be on your track, and she will be the first to approve of your determination. How do you think Combelaïne would look if some fine morning his spies told him that Delorge had disappeared totally and entirely?"

"Concealment would mean condemning myself to utter powerlessness."

"What would you do if you did not conceal yourself?"

"I don't know; but it seems to me——"

"You are wrong. You can do literally nothing now. It is between Combeldaine and Cornevin that the struggle is now going on. Who will be the conqueror? I will bet on Cornevin. If he triumphs, the woman you love will be yours. But if he fails, believe me when I say that you would not have won."

Raymond still continued to urge further objections. "Were I to disappear now, I might hopelessly complicate Cornevin's plans," he said.

"I believe that you would, on the contrary, serve them. Don't you think that you are a fearful care to him? Don't you think that, knowing as he must, that your life is in constant danger, and that you have already once escaped an assassin's knife, he is absorbed, in trying to protect you?"

What was there to say to such reasoning as this?

"I would not hesitate," answered Raymond, "if the opinion we have was based on anything more than conjectures."

Legris stopped him. "Suppose I brought you," he said, "the undisputable proof that the papers stolen from Madame Misri are not in Combeldaine's hands?"

"Then it would be very different. But how could you do so?"

"There is a way, perhaps," answered the doctor. And after a little hesitation, he said, in a changed voice: "Once I was madly in love with a woman who turned out very badly. I had the strength to break with her but I have not had strength to forget her. A man does not tear a passion from his heart as he tears out a tooth. In spite of everything, I still feel, I shall always feel, the greatest interest in this poor creature, who has now become a celebrity in her wretched circle. I have watched her from afar, and she has become a great friend of Flora Misri. Through her we have a chance of getting at the truth."

"Oh! doctor," murmured Raymond.

"For a year it would have been a great act of imprudence on my part to face this woman," said the doctor. "I was not cured. But now I am sure of myself. To see her again will be a frightful shock to me. I know this, but I am willing to endure it. I think she will do what I ask. To-morrow, before twelve o'clock, I will go to her and ask her to make Flora Misri talk."

II.

It was on the Boulevard Malesherbes, at the corner of the Rue de Su-resnes, and two steps from the Champs Elysées, that the woman whom Dr. Legris had formerly loved, resided. She called herself Lucy Bergam. To say that the doctor's heart did not beat a little quicker when he was fairly on his way to her rooms, would not be true. But he had promised Raymond to go there. He fulfilled a duty, he thought, and one that was all the more sacred since he had told the entire truth to his friend. He had not said, however, this Lucy Bergam was precisely the famous actress who had cost the young Duke de Maillefert so much money.

"Madame Lucy Bergam," said the concierge of the house, "lives on the second floor, the first door on the right. But she is probably out at this time of day."

M. Legris climbed the stairs very slowly, summoning all his strength to control the evidence of any emotion. He rang two or three times before the door was opened, which was finally done, in the slow, cautious style which people who fear an incursion from an enemy are apt to adopt. A chamber-

maid, with a sly, impudent expression, thrust her head out and examined the doctor from head to foot. "What do you want?" she said,

"I wish to speak to Madame Bergam."

"She is out."

It was easy to see that the girl was lying, although she did so in a most facile manner. Dr. Legris did not argue the point, but simply took out his card-case. "Hand this card," he said, "to Madame Bergam. I will go away; but I shall go down the stairs so slowly that you can recall me, if she should desire to receive me."

He had not descended ten steps when the maid rushed after him: "Madame will see you, sir," she exclaimed.

He turned back, and was shown into a drawing-room which was furnished in the most detestable taste, crowded with ill-assorted articles, some of them very valuable, and others simply ridiculous. However, this did not astonish the doctor; but he was surprised to see signs of a sudden departure scattered round the room. There were two huge trunks half-packed, and several bags and bonnet-boxes standing round about. On the tables, chairs, and floor lay a profusion of articles of clothing—cashmere shawls and linen, dresses, bonnets, petticoats—in fact, all that prodigious accumulation of raiment which a fashionable woman feels called on to drag about with her.

However, before Dr. Legris had time to reflect, a door was thrown open and Madame Lucy Bergam appeared wrapped in a once superb dressing-gown which was now tumbled and dirty, and with her hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Valentin!" she cried, as she advanced with open arms.

But the doctor drew back and said, coldly, "Yes—it is I."

He felt none of the emotion he had feared, and he knew that all was over, and that Madame Lucy could disturb him no more.

"I knew you had not forgotten me," she continued, breathlessly, "and that you would come to me if I were in trouble."

"Are you in trouble?" he asked.

She seemed to be utterly astonished. "What!" she exclaimed; "didn't you know it?"

"I know nothing."

"Why! all Paris is talking about it. The papers are full of it. Philippe is in prison."

The doctor started. "Philippe," he repeated, "Do you mean the young Duke de Maillefert?"

"Yes, he was arrested at five o'clock yesterday evening. We had gone to dine, together, with some of his friends, at the Café Anglais, when two gentlemen suddenly appeared and asked to see the duke for a moment. It was a nice moment, indeed, for as soon as they were shown into the room, they exclaimed—'Sir, we arrest you in the name of the law!'"

"It's most extraordinary," muttered the doctor.

"Had I been in Philippe's place," continued Madame Bergam, "I should have let these men know that a duke could not be arrested with impunity. But he was as meek as a lamb. He turned deadly pale and trembled so much that I really thought he would fall. He rolled his eyes about as he declared, over and over again, 'There is some mistake. I give you my word there is some mistake!' However, the others said they knew very well what they were about, and they had a warrant, and indeed they even showed it to him."

"And then he followed them?"

"Not immediately. He first asked for a vehicle. They said there was one at the door. He next asked permission to write some letters. They replied that their orders were that he should communicate with no one. He then said, 'Very well—let us go.' And they went off; but as Philippe reached the landing he turned and came to me, and whispered in my ear: 'Go and see Verdale and Combelaïne at once, and tell them that I consent to everything.'"

"To everything! To what?"

"Ah! I don't know."

"And you did as he told you?"

"I tried to do so; but I could not find M. de Combelaïne, and when I went to see Verdale there was no one there but his son, who received me as if I had come out of the gutter."

Dr. Legris was more and more astonished. All his previous ideas and theories were totally upset by this new and most extraordinary incident.

"But why was M. Philippe de Maillefert arrested?" he asked.

"I know no more about it than you," rejoined the young woman, "but there are some particulars in one of the newspapers. Wait a moment till I find it."

She looked about and finally discovered the paper she was in search of, and the doctor then read aloud the paragraph she pointed out to him:—

"Yesterday at the Bourse a rumour was in circulation of the arrest of one of our most conspicuous young noblemen, one who has already been celebrated for his constant ill-luck at the gambling-table and his falls upon the turf. Incredible as the rumour at first appeared, it was soon ascertained to be true, and we have been to obtain the following information, which we lay before our readers:—The young Duke de M—— was arrested at the house of a person of his acquaintance, and immediately taken before the investigating magistrate, M. Barban d'Avranchel, to whom the management of the affair is confided. Subsequently he was removed to the prison of the Conciergerie, where he still remains in custody."

"A person of his acquaintance, indeed!" grumbled Madame Bergam greatly offended. "They mean me of course, although he was not arrested at my house, and I think it would have been much better to have said so."

However, the doctor went on: "The young duke, it would appear has lately been the chairman of an important financial company, and we are assured that he has been guilty of some great irregularities, or if he has not himself committed them, he has allowed others to do so. However we will abstain to-day from repeating any of the stories in circulation; and our readers will naturally understand our reserve. We prefer to appear less well-informed than our contemporaries rather than add to the grief of a great family, by propagating a report which we trust may yet prove to be a mere misunderstanding."

"What an extraordinary thing!" muttered the doctor, as he slowly read this paragraph over again, trying to find out if there were nothing between the lines, and paying little or no attention to Madame Bergam, who was giving vent to a steady stream of words, expressive of her grief and anger.

"This is just my luck," she sighed. "Such things never happen to any one but me. Philippe arrested! And at what a time—just as I find myself in a dreadful fix, utterly overwhelmed with debts and without a sou. Philippe had paid no one for months, and has kept on saying to his creditors that before three months, he would be in possession of millions!"

At this moment the noise of a loud discussion was heard in the ante-room. "What can that be!" she asked, impatiently, and with heightened colour.

She was about to ring, when the impudent-looking maid appeared, and, in a sulky tone, exclaimed: "It's Monsieur Grollet."

"The livery stable-keeper?"

"Yes."

"Tell him to call again."

"Tell him so yourself, then, madame; for I can't."

Madame Bergam stamped her foot angrily.

"Bid him come in then."

Dr. Legris sheltered himself behind the newspaper. This name of Grollet had startled him, for was it not that of the groom at the Elysée Palace, who had been so audaciously substituted for Laurent Cornevin, and whose false swearing before M. Barban d'Avranchel had contributed to save De Combelaine?

Grollet came in and looked the very type of a prosperous horsey character—impudent and swaggering—a gold chain dangling from his waistcoat, and his hat on his head.

"What, is it you, M. Grollet," began Madame Lucy, in most dulcet tones, "who has come to torment me?"

"I need my money."

"Don't you know what has happened to me?"

"Monsieur de Maillefert in prison, do you mean?"

"Precisely."

The man gesticulated vehemently, as he said: "My money is lost, then, I suppose! Confound all these nobles! they are greater cheats and swindlers than any others. But I won't stand it, and you will please understand that it is no use to send to me for carriages any more, for you won't have them!"

He swore and raved, but somehow his anger did not strike Dr. Legris as altogether sincere.

"Dear M. Grollet!" supplicated Madame Lucy.

"What is it?"

"You will surely let me have a single horse-brougham with——?"

"Pay me some money on account then."

"Alas, I can't!"

"Then you will have no carriages."

"But what shall I do?"

"Do," sneered Grollet—"you will do like honest women. You will have to go about in omnibuses."

Madame Lucy looked at the doctor imploringly. Perhaps she vaguely hoped that he would take some bank-notes from his pocket and relieve her feelings by throwing them in the man's face. But in that case she was mistaken.

Dr. Legris only had eyes for Grollet. It struck him as very extraordinary that this man, whose establishment was one of the best known and most lucrative in Paris, should come in person to make a scene—a disagreeable proceeding which is usually left to a subordinate or a lawyer. Was he not obeying orders?

"Very well," replied Madame Lucy, tired of waiting for some interference from the doctor; "I will go about in omnibuses, then. Only don't be uneasy—I will pay you sooner or later."

"Take your time," replied the man roughly; "only if you don't pay me, I shall seize your furniture." And thereupon he went off.

Madame Bergam seemed inclined to have a fit of hysterics. "Just think of it," she sobbed; "as soon as these people know you to be in trouble, they fall on you tooth and nail. Upholsterer, milliner, and dressmaker, they have come in steady procession ever since the morning. I shall be arrested for debt, I'm sure of it. Oh! if Philippe were only here! But if ever he comes out of prison he shall pay me for this! The idea of leaving a woman in such a position!"

It was not only on Philippe's head that Madame Lucy poured out her anathemas; a considerable proportion of them were directed to the doctor, who had not interfered. But he was determined not to understand her, and so with the most careless air in the world, he said: "Then it is this fracas that causes your departure?"

"What departure?"

With a gesture he pointed to the disordered room, the trunks and bags.

"True," replied the young woman, "true! I forgot. Unfortunately, it isn't I who am going. I have a great many beautiful things—cashmeres, worth a thousand crowns a piece, laces at twenty-five louis a yard, and diamonds valued at more than a hundred thousand francs. But my furniture is not entirely paid for, so that I have nothing to depend upon but my clothes and jewellery. And the brigands will take them from me! They will say that I have ruined Philippe, and I shall have to let them say so, because it is somewhat flattering, after all. But just look at it yourself. How can I ruin a man who has nothing? Philippe has'n't a farthing; we have been living on credit everywhere. He told me that, the day after his sister's marriage we should roll in gold. Only his sister doesn't seem inclined to marry, and I am left in the lurch like this, and expected to keep his creditors at bay. Ah; if I had only known, I should have remained a shop girl in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques."

Perhaps there was some truth in what she said. Perhaps Dr. Legris was more cruelly avenged than he dreamed. But what did it matter to him now?

"Do you mean," he asked, "that all these things lying about here are not yours?"

"No, indeed—they don't belong to me. They belong to Flora Misri, a friend of mine, who has been hiding here with me for nearly a fortnight."

The doctor's eyes gleamed. "Hiding? Why, what was the poor woman afraid of?"

"Of Combelaïne. Ah! if she had only believed me. But no, the man has bewitched her. She is really afraid to go to her own rooms. All those things you see there were fetched piece by piece, by my maid. She, who was once so covetous and suspicious, now trusts her keys, and even those of her secretaire to the first comer. We were just going to pack her trunks when you came in. She intends to go off to England this very night, and thence to America."

No one knew better than Dr. Legris how much reliance could be placed in this woman's statements, but he smiled doubtfully. "A pretty story," he said, cheerfully, "a capital one!"

He wished to pique Madame Bergam, and he succeeded the more easily as she thought that he doubted the reality of her distress.

"You think I am lying," she cried; "well, wait a bit, you shall see for yourself." So saying she opened a door and called out: "Flora! Flora!"

Madame Misri instantly appeared. Her pallor and the circles round her eyes showed how little she had slept, as did her nervous, frightened glance and fluttering hands. There was no mistaking her age now. However, the doctor went towards her and abruptly said: "Madame, I am the intimate friend of M. Raymond Delorge."

A faint colour rose to Madame Misri's face. "M. Delorge has behaved," she said, "in the most dishonourable way. I had the weakness to reveal to him the existence of certain papers, and he profited by this knowledge to enter my rooms and steal them."

She evidently believed what she said.

"You are mistaken, madame," answered the doctor; "I swear to you that my friend never touched your papers."

"Who did then?"

"The one person who had the greatest interest in taking them—the Count de Combelaïne."

Madame Bergam listened in astonishment to this conversation, and began to suspect that Dr. Legris had not come for her sake after all.

"No, it was not Combelaïne who robbed me," said Madame Misri.

"How do you know?" asked the doctor.

"He told me so."

"Did he never lie to you?"

She shivered at some recollection, and then eagerly added: "At all events, he did not lie on this occasion. On the day after I had met Monsieur Delorge, in despair at what I had done, I came here to pass the night on a sofa."

"Yes," interposed her friend, "that's true."

"At eight o'clock in the morning I sent for a cab and drove home. I had decided on what I would do. I had resolved to give Victor back all his papers without any conditions whatever. I opened my secretaire for them, and they were gone! I questioned my servants. They had seen and heard nothing. I lost my head, and I don't know what I did. My sister came in the midst of all the hubbub. I really think I was crazy."

"That was what Madame Cornevin said," interrupted the doctor.

"My sister had just gone," continued Madame Flora, "when Victor appeared. He knew of my leaving his house with young Delorge, and he was furious. He shut the door of my room, and locked it behind him. 'Now then,' he said, 'give me those papers this moment.' I had hoped till then that it was he who had them. 'But you know,' I said, 'that I have not got them any longer!' At this he became absolutely livid, and without one word he darted to my secret drawer, where he supposed I kept them. But they were not there. 'Ah! miserable woman,' he cried, 'you have sold them to the son of General Delorge!' He looked so awful that I fell on my knees, and swore to him that I had not done so. But he would not listen to me. He caught me by the throat. 'You will see,' he cried, 'how I treat traitors!' And he would certainly have killed me, if one of my servants, hearing my cries, had not burst the door open and saved my life."

It was with the greatest difficulty that Dr. Legris concealed the immense satisfaction he felt on hearing all this. "And after that?" he asked.

"After that, I thought Victor would go crazy with rage. 'I have not succeeded this time,' he said, setting his teeth, 'but your hour will come.' Then, before going away, he added: 'Your friends, Raymond Delorge, and all the scoundrels who have paid you for your infernal treason are no doubt

triumphant. But they crow too soon. I am possibly lost; but they are not saved, and I don't intend to perish alone. They don't know what a man like myself can do when he is pushed to extremities.' I tried to undeceive him—I tried to convince him that I had been a victim, as well as himself. But he would not listen. 'Go and find your Delorge,' he said, with a sneer 'and let him protect you, if he can!' and then he went away."

She stopped. She was in such a pitiful state that Madame Lucy, whose tears were always ready to flow, now began to weep. "Poor Flora!" she sobbed.

However, Madame Misri continued: "When Victor had gone I fell on the floor unconscious. When I recovered myself I found Dr. Buiron leaning over me. You know him, perhaps?"

Yes, M. Legris knew him. Dr. Buiron was the very physician who, eighteen years before, had been called to the Elysée to see General Delorge, when he was already stiff and cold. "M. Buiron is a fellow practitioner," said Raymond's friend simply.

"He is a very sagacious man," rejoined Madame Flora, "as is proved by the fact that he is rich, both in purse and honours. And yet, when my eyes met his, I shuddered with horror, for I knew this Dr. Buiron; he often came to pass the evening with Victor. There was a letter from him among the papers which were stolen. So my first idea was: 'This man has come to poison me!'"

Poor Madame Misri! Big tears rolled down her pale cheeks. "I knew very well," she sobbed, "that it would be a very easy thing to get rid of me, and that it would be a crime unattended by much risk. Who would take any trouble about a woman like myself? Men ruin themselves for us—they give us diamonds and flatter us; but when it comes to anything more, they give us the cold shoulder and pass on."

Dr. Legris watched Madame Bergam out of the corners of his eyes. She sat pale and trembling, struck dumb by the despair of this woman whose life she had thought so enviable. "Of course," continued Madame Misri, "I did not allow Dr. Buiron to perceive my suspicions. 'If he realizes that I distrust him,' I said to myself, 'my life would not be worth a moment's purchase!'" So I thanked him, and promised to follow all his prescriptions with the utmost fidelity. But as soon as he had gone, I threw everything he had sent me from the chemist's away, and then I came here. I knew that Lucy had a good heart, and that she would never abandon a friend in trouble, nor betray me, even if they offered her my weight in gold."

"I would die sooner than betray a friend," interrupted Madame Bergam.

"I know that," continued Flora. "I know that very well. Poor darling, I have bored you to death, and given you no end of trouble; but I will show you that I am not ungrateful."

"I ask for nothing, Flora."

"No, but I shall not forget what I owe you, all the same. You are in trouble, and your creditors take advantage of the duke's arrest to worry you. But I am here. I don't choose that my friend Lucy should be arrested, nor that they should make her cry. I have money of my own, and you shall have enough from me, as a gift, to get clear of your creditors."

With one common impulse the women rose and embraced each other with an effusion which would have touched the doctor if he had not under-

stood the true sense of this touching scene. It was now quite clear that Madame Bergam had fully intended to utilize her friend's secrets, and it was equally evident that Madame Flora's sudden and unexpected outburst of generosity was intended to prevent any treason.

As soon as Madame Misri was seated again, the doctor asked: "And now, my dear madame, would it be an indiscretion on my part if I were to ask what you propose to do?"

She looked at him suspiciously. "I have not yet decided," she answered.

The doctor touched one of her trunks with his foot. "I thought you were about to start on a long journey," he said.

"Perhaps."

He expected this cautious reserve. "I am unknown to you, madame——" he began.

But Madame Bergam interrupted him.

"Oh! you may speak out before Valentin," she cried. "I will answer for him."

"I trust, madame, that you will not continue to distrust me when you remember that I am the intimate friend of Raymond Delorge."

"Yes, I forgot—you are his friend."

"His most intimate friend," answered the doctor—"which is to say that our interests, fears, and hopes are one and the same."

At this moment he was interrupted by a great noise of doors, and by a voice in the anteroom, shouting in an angry tone: "I tell you she is here, and I bid you go and tell her that Baron Verdale wishes to see her."

On hearing this name, Flora Misri turned deadly pale. "Verdale!" she gasped. "Victor has sent him—and I am lost!"

To judge what Combelaine was capable of, it was only necessary to note the terror of this poor woman, who knew him so well. "You have nothing to fear, madame," said the doctor; "at least not while I am here."

"Can you not hide her somewhere?" proposed Madame Lucy, eager to serve the friend who had come to her rescue financially. And so saying she opened the door of her sleeping-room. "Go in there," she added, "this gentleman and I will receive your visitor for you."

It was time indeed for, indignant at the obstinate resistance of the servant, Baron Verdale pushed his way past her into the room.

He was the same man as of old, with all the intolerable insolence of a *parvenu*. He was redder than usual, too. Without noticing the doctor, who had retired into a corner, he exclaimed, addressing Lucy: "I knew very well you were at home. What by Jupiter do you mean by shutting yourself up in this way so that people can't get at you?"

"Then you wish to speak to me, sir?"

"Of course I do."

Then it was not for Madame Misri he came, and the luckless woman who heard this in the next room now breathed more freely.

Without deigning to sit down, and in the same rude manner, the architect exclaimed: "You called on me last evening?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And as I was absent you asked to see my son?"

"Not at all—your servant showed me into the room where a young man was."

"Very well, that young man was my son."

A little shrug of Madame Lucy's shoulders was her sole reply.

Verdale's ill humour increased. "Do you know," he said, "that it was a most underhand way of getting into a house to tell tales?"

"Sir——!"

Although Madame Lucy was not in the habit of being treated with exaggerated respect, she was not disposed to submit to this sort of thing. "I am not in the habit of telling tales, sir," she replied, drawing herself up haughtily.

"But at all events you did so. What did you mean by talking to my son? When I came in I found him as disagreeable as possible."

It was evident to Dr. Legris that M. Verdale, like many other fathers of the same stamp and style, had found a most inconvenient censor in his son.

"I told him nothing at all," rejoined Madame Lucy. "The young man, who was anything but civil, did not even give me time to repeat what Philippe had told me to say to M. de Combeldaine and yourself. That is, the duke told me to tell you that he consented to everything."

"Upon my word! Does he, indeed! And when did he intrust you with this commission?"

"When he was arrested."

Verdale made an impatient gesture, and rejoined: "Then the story is true, which I read in the papers this morning about the arrest?"

"Most true, unfortunately. But haven't you seen Monsieur de Combeldaine?"

"Combeldaine! Does one ever see him? Does one ever hear him? Does one ever know what he is manouevring for?"

The angry blood rose to the architect's face. He forgot that he was not alone. "He is in hiding," he said; "and it is as well he should be, after what he has done. The idea of arresting the Duke de Maillefert! Was there ever such folly seen—to attract inquisitive eyes to our affairs? How can he now expect to stop these investigations just when and where he pleases? I have only just got what I deserved, for I knew De Combeldaine thoroughly. Don't I know that he would burn down the house of his best friend to warm water for a foot-bath for himself? To think of his not warning me—of his saying nothing to me—of exposing me to this sort of thing!"

If Dr. Legris had had any further doubts, they would have been removed by this explosion. An audacious inspiration came to him. He approached Verdale, and said, in an easy tone: "Perhaps you would not blame M. de Combeldaine so much if you knew the reasons of his conduct."

It was with a look of consternation that the architect now eyed this stranger, whom he had not at first perceived, and who struck him as having risen through the floor. He choked a bit, and then remarked: "You know these reasons, then, sir, do you?"

"I think I know them."

"Ah!"

"An accident has happened to M. de Combeldaine."

"An accident?"

"Yes; or call it an annoyance, if you like—and this hastened his resolutions. M. de Combeldaine is a prudent man, and he knows that he must take fortune at its highest tide now. He had collected and placed, in what he considered a very safe place, a quantity of documents which seriously compromised his very best friends—all people of influence and fortune. These papers were intended, as one may say, to provide for his old age."

The architect became impatient: "To the point, sir, if you please."

"Well, sir, M. de Combelaïne no longer has these precious documents."

"Do you mean those papers he was foolish enough to trust to Flora?"

"They have been stolen."

The color faded from Verdale's face. "I knew that would happen," he said, in a tone of consternation. "Yes, I foresaw it. The day that Flora Misri first threatened us with those papers, I said to Combelaïne, 'Take care! Take care!' But he laughed in my face. Flora, in his opinion, was his property, who would think, feel, and act according to his bidding, and he had nothing to fear from her; but this is the end of it!"

He relapsed into silence, probably measuring the extent of his peril; then, addressing the doctor, he said: "Have you any idea who could have stolen these papers?"

This question was just what the doctor anticipated, and he flattered himself that his reply would serve Cornevin. "It is supposed they were carried off by young Delorge."

"The son of General Delorge?"

"Precisely."

"But for what object?"

"To prevent Mademoiselle de Maillefert from marrying M. de Combelaïne."

"M. Delorge cannot do that," Verdale replied.

"Who knows?"

"I assure you that is impossible. As for Flora, she won't enjoy her treachery, I fancy, without some alloy. And I bid you both good morning."

And, thereupon he went off without having once lifted his hat from his head and shrugging his shoulders as if he reproached himself for taking the trouble to waste his precious time about such frivolous matters.

"He is in a nice temper!" cried Madame Bergam, "and I am inclined to believe there will be a famous scene between him and Combelaïne;" and at the thought she laughed with glee. "The result will be Philippe's release," she continued. "Poor boy! He is too stupid to be a rascal."

She could not continue, for Madame Flora now came out of the room where she had taken refuge on Verdale's arrival. She had knelt with her ear at the keyhole, and had not lost one word of the conversation. "You see," she said to the doctor, "you deceived me, for it was M. Delorge who took the papers."

"Excuse me——"

"You have just told M. Verdale that it was he who took them."

"No, madame."

"You did—I heard you."

"Not precisely; but I wished him to think so, that I admit, for I had my reasons."

She interrupted him in a violent tone! "That is to say, you betray me, too, as all the others have done!"

To dispute with a woman, whose brain is disturbed by anger and fear, is to lose one's time. But Dr. Legris had determined to conquer Madame Flora. So arming himself, with patience, he replied: "Think of what you are saying. How could I betray you? Why should I betray you? For the advantage of De Combelaïne, who is our mortal enemy, who has already assassinated Raymond's father, and who now wishes to rob him of the woman he loves and who loves him? That's foolish. You ought to know that."

Whether she realized it or not, was not certain. At all events, her features softened.

"Your life is threatened by De Combelaïne," continued the doctor, who warmed up to his work. "Between himself and you there is a contest which will, and must last, until one of you shuffles off this mortal coil. This is also precisely my friend's situation. So you and Raymond, whose interests and views are so similar, ought to act together, and aid each other."

"That's true," murmured Madame Misri—"that's true, but——"

"You complain of having no allies and friends. Whose fault is it? You are in a state of indecision between the man whom you have every reason to fear, and the man from whom you have so much to hope. For Heaven's sake take one side or the other."

Madame Lucy here spoke, with a little sneer. "You are losing your time, my dear," she said to the doctor. "Flora will promise all you ask; and your back will no sooner be turned, than she will write to Combelaïne to tell him everything and implore his pardon."

She did not believe one word she said; but she had reflected a great deal during Verdale's visit, and she saw that it was to her interest to declare herself against the people who had arrested Philippe, in order, as she believed, to get hold of his millions—those millions respecting which she had herself formed many agreeable plans. Her raillery, she thought, would be the stinging lash which would decide her friend; and she was not mistaken.

Madame Misri started up with blazing cheeks and flashing eyes; and, in a tone of the fiercest hatred, she exclaimed: "I have been base and cowardly in the past, but that is gone by now. So long as Victor lives I shall tremble for my life. If I knew what words to utter in order to send him to the scaffold, my lips should speak them within the hour." And so saying, she extended her hand to the doctor. "I am with you, sir—with M. Delorge—with my sister. You may rely on me. What do you want of me? Speak!"

A smile of triumph passed over the doctor's lips. "Before anything else," he began, "I should like to know your plans."

"I intend to leave Paris to night, sir."

"Leave Paris? But where would you be any safer?"

"I must go to some place where Combelaïne will not follow me; or, rather, where he won't know I am."

"That is to say, you wish him to lose all trace of you—you hope to escape from the spies which you consider are now around you?"

"I hope so; for all my plans are laid, and my measures are taken with that object. Judge for yourself; my preparations for departure are nearly completed. To night, at eight o'clock, I shall send for a cab on which my luggage will be placed. This cab will convey my dear Lucy and her maid Ernestine, dressed in such a way that the latter will be taken for me, to the Western Railway station, where Ernestine will procure a ticket for London, where she will await my orders at a hotel agreed upon. In the meantime, I shall dress in Ernestine's clothes and go down and see the concierge; I shall offer him ten, twenty, a hundred louis, if it be necessary, to give me the means of climbing over the wall which separates the court-yard of this house from the next one, the entrance of which is in the Rue de Suresnes. Will the concierge refuse? I think not. I shall climb this wall, and shall then be in the street, wearing a servant's costume and carrying a large wicker basket. I shall take the first cab I see, and arrive at the Montparnasse station in time to catch the train for Brest. Thence I go to New York by a steamer, on which my passage is taken under a false name, thanks to

a passport procured for me by M. Coutanceau. Once in America I shall communicate with Ernestine, and have my trunks sent to me without allowing her, however, to suspect where I am. If I cannot do this, that is to say if I lose my trunks, it can't be helped, that's all. Coutanceau will watch over all my interests here. When he came to see me on the day before yesterday I gave him a full power of attorney."

Never did a woman's face express more astonishment and disgust than Madame Lucy's. "Do you mean, Flora," she cried, "that you have arranged this programme yourself?"

"Yes, with Coutanceau's help."

"And you never said a word about it to me!"

"What was the good? Am I not sure of you? Would you refuse a service to a friend, who will release you from all embarrassment, before she leaves?"

"Of course not."

"And would Ernestine hesitate to go to London if I gave her five or six thousand louis?"

"Ernestine would go round the world for that."

"You see, then, that I have foreseen everything," said Madame Flora. And repressing a shiver, she added. "After all, it makes one rather ingenious when one is fighting for life."

She was right. Her plan, moreover, was simple enough and sufficiently well conceived to have ninety-nine chances out of a hundred of success. But in Dr. Legris' eyes it was totally wrong, for he meant to keep Madame Misri within reach, just as one keeps a loaded pistol. "And so madame," he said, "you would desert us at a most critical moment?"

"I would, indeed."

"Is this very—generous?"

"Perhaps not," answered Madame Flora, with the cynical frankness imparted by fear; "but, after all, in this world, every one for oneself. I can't live here; Combelaïne told me that he had doomed me, and I know very well what that means, for I have heard him use that expression of three persons, and in less than a month they were carried to the cemetery."

The doctor saw that he had made a mistake, so he ceased to argue the point. "Go, then, dear madame," he said; "only I——"

"Only what?"

"Only that I believe Paris to be the only city where you can live in security. Here you might escape De Combelaïne's spies, who will follow Ernestine, to be sure, when they take her for you; but in twenty-four hours they will have discovered their error, and before two days are over they will be on your track. When you arrive in America one of Combelaïne's agents who has been warned by cable, will be at the docks.

Poor Flora grew deadly pale. "Oh!" she said, faintly.

Sure of having touched her now, the doctor went on coldly: "America is a great and powerful land, but the people are peculiar. They respect liberty, even to excess. They would never tolerate such a police as ours, whose paternal solicitude is carried to excess."

"You mean, then——"

"I mean that if I were desirous of getting rid of an enemy, I should try and induce him to go to America."

Resolved to serve Dr. Legris', cause, Madame Lucy now interfered. "Ah! dear Flora," she cried, "listen to Valentin. Don't go to that horrible country."

Madame Misri's pale face was expressive of perplexity. "What would you advise me to do, then?" she asked the doctor.

"Remain in Paris."

"But I should die of fear and——"

Legris interrupted her. "I don't advise you to remain here openly."

"Ah!"

"I will agree to hide you."

"Alas! and how?"

"In the most simple way. Execute your plan to a certain extent. The first part of it is excellent. Ernestine will go to London, and you, dear madame, will climb your wall. Only, instead of taking the first cab you meet in the Rue de Suresnes, you will go straight to a vehicle where a friend is waiting for you. This friend, who is wise and prudent, will have prepared a safe retreat for you, he will take you there, and you can wait the progress of events patiently."

"And you think——"

"I think nothing—I am certain that this would be far better."

Madame Misri reflected. "But where," she said; "am I to find a devoted friend?"

"You have me, madame, and I am ready to save you."

"Ah! Flora, were I in your place I shouldn't hesitate," said Madame Lucy.

However, Madame Misri continued to weep silently, and the doctor was arming himself with new arguments, when all at once she exclaimed: "Well, you may expect me to-night in the Rue de Suresnes."

"This evening! no; for I wish to prepare a place of safety for you. You had better say to-morrow."

But she was firm. "No; to-night—and now, the hour?"

"I will be in a cab at eight o'clock, opposite number 20. So that you may run no risk of a mistake, the corner of a white handkerchief will hang out of the window of the cab."

"It is understood then, sir, that I confide myself entirely to you?"

"You shall never have occasion to repent of your confidence, I swear it to you, madame."

When Dr. Legris retired shortly afterwards, Madame Lucy went to the door with him, and on reaching the ante-room she laid her hand on his arm.

"And so," she said, "it was not for me that you came."

"I admit it," he answered, with a smile.

She sighed, and in a husky voice she said, "You have forgotten me, then? and yet——" He did not reply. "All right," she said; "it is better as it is—particularly for you. But we remain friends, do we not? You see that my sympathies are on your side. Adieu!"

III.

As he went down the stairs Dr. Legris said to himself:

"Yes—it is indeed better for me!"

And yet it was not without a certain surprise that he found his heart so light and untroubled. It was, indeed, all over. He had been totally unmoved by the voice and the eyes of Madame Lucy. His only sensation had been a sort of shame that he had ever loved her. The prism was broken, and he saw her as she really was—beautiful, to be sure, but silly, common-

place and vulgar—perverse, heartless and unscrupulous. "And this is the end," he said, "of a passion which I believed would be life-long."

But it was neither the place nor the hour to philosophise, and as he could see no cabs in the neighbourhood, he hurried off on foot, eagerly anticipating the effect of the good news he was taking to Raymond. He knew that he had a great deal to tell, and he felt that the result of his visit to Madame Bergam would be enormous. He had proved to his own satisfaction that no one but Laurent Cornevin could have carried away Flora's papers, and he said to himself that a man possessing such weapons should be invincible. Then was it not a wise plan to induce Madame Misri to remain in Paris? It certainly was; but still he was somewhat embarrassed to keep his promise to find a safe retreat for her.

He remembered among his clients, however, the widow of an officer of engineers, to whom he had rendered one of those services which can never be forgotten. This woman was past middle age, intelligent and energetic, and lived in a little house at Batignolles. It was there he decided to take Madame Misri, feeling certain that no person would ever go there to look for her. And the widow was precisely the person to sustain, encourage, and forbid imprudence on the part of a woman like Flora.

As deeply interested as if he were pursuing his own affairs rather than those of a friend of a fortnight's standing, M. Legris followed the steep ascent of the Rue Blanche. Just as he passed the Rue Moncey he heard himself called by name. "Dr. Legris! doctor!"

It was old Krauss who came towards him with despairing gestures. "What is the matter?" asked Dr. Legris.

"A great misfortune," answered the old soldier. "M. Raymond was dressing to go out after breakfast when a gentleman called to see him. I have seen this gentleman before—that is, he has been at the house. He looked pale and frightened. I showed him into my master's study, but he did not stay more than five minutes, and then went away in great haste. Monsieur Raymond next told his mother and me that a secret society, of which he was a member, had been discovered; that the lists of members were seized, and many members already arrested. Oh! sir, what a woman my mistress is! She didn't lose time in lamenting, but simply said, 'Very well; you must fly. Conceal yourself in Belgium. Fortunately I have three or four thousand francs on hand. Take them, and go at once.'"

"And he has gone?"

"Yes, sir; but before he left he bade me search for you, and prevent you from going near the house, which is watched. I was to tell you that he wished to speak to you, and would wait at the *café* where you took such good care of him—the *Café de Périclès*."

Dr. Legris had predicted all this, and it needed but small foresight to do so, inasmuch as this complication was the natural sequence of the forged summons sent to Raymond as coming from the Society of the Friends of Justice. Having a weapon ready at hand, De Combelaire used it. Nothing could have been more simple. The only thing singular about the transaction was that this blow had been so long in coming. Why had Raymond not been arrested at the outset?

"I really cannot understand that," muttered M. Legris.

"That is precisely what M. Raymond said when he left the house," Krauss replied.

"How long ago was that?"

"About an hour. You will go and meet him at once, will you not, sir?"

"Yes, at once."

The old soldier's voice trembled. "Then tell him, I beg of you, to keep his eyes open. Tell him to distrust his own shadow. With cowards and assassins there's no disgrace in being prudent."

"You may rely on me, my good Krauss," answered the doctor. And after pressing the hand of the faithful servant, he, instead of following the Rue Blanche, turned into the Rue Boursault, in order to reach the outer boulevard more quickly.

He hurried along with considerable apprehension. Might not Raymond be arrested already? "What utter folly!" he muttered, "to appoint such a well-known place to meet me as the Café de Périclès, which is known, too, as a place where he often goes."

However, he reached the café, which, as usual at this hour, was quiet and almost deserted. Three persons were there—two artists, who were playing at billiards, and the journalist Peyrolas, who, seated at a table, with his ink-bottle beside him, wrote on in a sort of rage. "No Raymond!" said the doctor to himself, turning pale.

Softly as he entered, the furious journalist looked up. "Doctor," he cried, "come here!" And as the doctor meekly obeyed, the journalist continued—"I have written two articles which will make a great stir. I risk having the paper suppressed. I know it, and my liberty is at stake; but no matter! I shall have at least the consciousness of having raised my voice when fear closed all other lips!"

"But what has gone wrong?" asked Dr. Legris, in an absent sort of way.

"The journals announce the discovery of a grand conspiracy."

Legris started. "Does it concern the Friends of Justice?"

"Precisely. There have been fifty arrests already, while to-morrow there will be a thousand. Before the end of the week five hundred citizens will be sent to Cayenne, under the fallacious pretext that they have attempted to disturb order and peace. Do you know, doctor, what I have written, and what I intend to print?" He struck his breast as he spoke. "I intend," he cried, "to prove that this plot never existed—that there has never been any such society, that it is the grossest invention of the police, an abject machination, and an ignoble trap."

The doctor was on thorns. "I must leave you," he said, to the foaming penman, who, however, was not so easily disposed of.

"One moment. I have kept the best till the end. Have you heard nothing of yesterday's scandal?"

"What scandal?"

"Ah! doctor, what hospital do you come from? Are you really ignorant of the fact that the Duke de Maillefert, a real *bona fide* duke, has been arrested?"

Although he wrote the hottest, maddest articles, M. Peyrolas had certain qualities which made him valuable in his line. His facts were usually authentic, as Legris was well aware. So he controlled every sign of anxiety, and quietly asked: "Have you the details?"

The journalist threw back his head haughtily. "Who should have them but me? I have pumped the concierge at the Maillefort mansion, the concierge at the house where a certain actress resides, two employés of the Rural Bank Company, and the cashier at Verdale's. I can even give you the *menu* of the duke's dinner in prison."

"I assure you that I don't care for it," protested the doctor. "I simply

wished to know how a nobleman like the Duke de Maillefert could be mixed up with these rascally financial operations."

Peyrolas pulled up his shirt-collar with an air of importance. "Really, nothing can be more simple," he said, "for a year or two the duke has traded on his ancestors. He was well known at the Bourse. Whoever wanted a high-sounding name on a prospectus knew where to find one, but they had to pay for it, as they would for any article of merchandize. After breathing the fumes of all these financial cook-shops, our young friend took a notion of putting his own hand to the sauce. So one fine morning he joined a company, organized by a cunning rascal whom I have heard you speak of, a certain Baron Verdale, who is about as much of a baron as that waiter is in the corner."

Dr. Legris expected to hear this name. "And then?" he asked.

"Then, when De Maillefert saw that the strong-box was pretty full, he said to himself, 'This money ought to belong to me'—and, to be brief, he employed these funds precisely as he might have done had they been his own."

"But how was the discovery made?"

"In pretty much the same style, I fancy, as all thefts are discovered. Verdale cried out, 'Where is the money?' and as the duke was the only person who could possibly have taken it, he filed a complaint against the young nobleman."

To reconcile this statement and Verdale's surprise at Madame Lucy's was difficult. "Are you sure of what you say, my dear Peyrolas?" asked the doctor.

"Sure? I tell you I have interviewed Verdale's cashier, and have my information from him."

"And haven't you heard that De Combelaine was mixed up in the affair?"

The journalist seemed much astonished. "De Combelaine!" he repeated. "No, I haven't heard his name, and I really don't see——" But he checked himself, and then vehemently exclaimed: "You are right, doctor; Combelaine is about to marry Mademoiselle de Maillefert. Not a week ago, I myself wrote an article on the deterioration of the national character—stating that one of the oldest families of France was about to give their daughter to a miserable adventurer, without either money or honour."

He did not speak; he roared, and Adonis, the waiter, awoke with a start. Recognizing the doctor, he rose with a cheerful "good-morning," and then, drawing M. Legris aside, he explained that Raymond was waiting for him in a small room up-stairs.

Hastily deserting the journalist, who seemed quite shocked at his abruptness, Dr. Legris was up-stairs in three seconds. Raymond was smoking a cigar beside a table on which stood an untouched glass of beer.

"What!" cried the doctor, utterly exasperated, "you sit here calm and comfortable, and yet you know the police to be at your heels. Come with me—this house has a rear door that I know of."

But Raymond did not move. "Oh! there is no hurry," he said in a strange sort of way.

"No hurry! But do you not know that one hundred and fifty at least of your friends are already arrested?"

"It is because I know it, that I am not alarmed."

"Oh! Come now!"

"Permit me to explain. Don't you think it strange that I was not the first one arrested, when in reality the expedition was directed against me?"

"Very strange, and so I said to Krauss."

"I did not think of it until this morning, when a member of the society came to me and said: 'All is discovered—fly!'"

"I did fly, but I reflected later. The police are not such fools. If I were warned, it was because they intended me to be. I am convinced that they do not wish to imprison me."

"But, my dear fellow——"

"Wait a moment; let me show you. Would my arrest rid De Combelaïne and his honourable associates of me? By no means? It would expose them, on the contrary to most dangerous revelations. But if, on the contrary, they induced me to fly to Belgium, I should leave the field clear, and they would be quiet to do as they pleased."

The doctor rubbed his forehead. "Ah!" he muttered, "I did not think of that."

"Let me finish. Combelaïne, undoubtedly, supposes me to be the person who carried off his papers. Of course, if that were the case, I should have them about me, so that was why he set his banditti upon me at once. They would attack me again at their very first opportunity. But a conspirator who is obliged to keep himself concealed is about the least dangerous enemy a man can have, and one that he will find the easiest to get rid of. Let him be found some morning dead in the gutter, with a dagger in his breast, and no one will take the trouble to make any inquiry."

He expressed himself with such cold indifference that the doctor was struck by it. "What a tone you speak in!" he exclaimed.

"I say it simply like a man who has nothing to fear or dread in life would be likely to say it. It would be a great favour, on M. de Combelaïne's part, if he would have me assassinated."

Legris was confounded. "I wish," he said, "you wouldn't talk in that way. When I left you yesterday you were full of hope."

Raymond's eyes flashed. "Haven't you noticed," he said, "that I have not even taken the trouble to ask the result of your inquiries?" As he spoke he drew a letter from his pocket and threw it on the table. "I received this note this morning," he continued. "Read it, and you will understand my present mood."

It was a letter from Simone. "So prayers, tears, and supplications are useless," she wrote "You act, you have acted, and all is lost. My sacrifice—the saddest which a woman can ever make—is rendered useless. I shall have given my life for nothing. I shall not have saved the honour of the house and the name which my father so prized, and which will now be for ever blasted. And it is you who have done this!—you who claim to be my best, my only friend! So isn't your love the most selfish of passions? Do not try to write to me and excuse yourself. Never again will my lips pronounce your name, while God allows me to live on earth. As for the few days which remain to me I shall spend them in tearing from my heart a love which now fills me with horror. Rejoice at your work, and, if you can, forget

"SIMONE DE MAILLEFERT."

"What do you think of that?" asked Raymond, bitterly, as Dr. Legris laid down the letter.

"This letter," was the reply, "is the result of yesterday's events."

"I don't see that."

"You will see it when I tell you that Philippe is in prison, accused embezzlement."

As in a vision Raymond at once recalled the young Duke de Maillefert as he had seen him one morning on the steps of the mansion, pale, undecided, and agitated, between Verdale and Combelaine. "It is abominable!" he cried. "Philippe is a fool, and selfish to a degree, but he is incapable of crime."

"So Madame Bergam says."

"He is the victim of some diabolical conspiracy!"

"I am sure of it. I can almost prove it."

Raymond's colour rose, and he answered eagerly: "All is not lost, then!"

Dr. Legris smiled. "I feel certain," he replied, "that our triumph is at hand, for I am positive that Laurent Cornevin keeps in the background, and strikes these blows from out of the shade. Listen to what I have done to-day."

He then rapidly related his visit to Madame Bergam, mentioning the appearance of Grollet, and M. Verdale, the latter's treatment of Madame Lucy, and what he said to her, and, finally, the story of the duke's arrest, as he had heard it from Peyrolas."

Raymond was stunned. "Yes," he said at last, "light is breaking. But will Simone retract her words?"

"Yes, if we save her brother."

"Alas! what can we do for him?"

"Who can tell? Have I not told you that discord is in your enemies' camp? for it was not Verdale who denounced the duke—that's clear. It was Combelaine. Verdale wished to confine himself to threats, but Combelaine has gone on ahead, and carried the threats into execution. Now we must find some one who has influence over Verdale. Who could that be? Have we any such person near us? Yes; for one day when you wanted to call Combelaine out, Verdale and Roberjot met, by accident, in your presence. What happened then? Did you not tell me that Verdale, on seeing Roberjot, became as white as linen, although naturally so red, and humble even to servility, although usually so arrogant? This shows that there is some secret between them. Come—we will go and see Roberjot."

Nothing was more trying to Raymond than this step. Nothing was more humiliating than to confess to Roberjot, now that he needed his help, all that he had so long concealed from him. But as M. Roberjot was the only person to whom he could turn in his extremity, he was forced to submit. "Let us go," he said, after the hesitation of a moment. "I shall be followed, I know; but what does that matter, since I am certain they won't arrest me? It will be time to-night to decide how to throw them off the track."

Roberjot was just sitting down to dinner when his servant told him that M. Delorge was there and wished to see him. "Show him in!" cried the lawyer, and he darted to meet his young friend with his napkin in his hand. "Is it you?" he said; "your mother thinks you far on your way to Belgium. Have you lost your head, or do you prefer incarceration to liberty?"

"I believe myself to be running no possible danger," answered Raymond; "and when I have made you master of the whole affair, you will understand my conduct." He moved aside as he said this, and added, "My friend, Dr. Legris, and I have come to you for advice and assistance."

Roberjot did not seem particularly charmed by this preamble—nor by the presence of this stranger whom he had not seen at first. But putting a

good face on the matter, he invited the two friends into the dining-room. As soon as they were seated, Dr. Legris opened his batteries, and told Roberjot precisely in what position Raymond stood, and all that had happened.

So interested was the lawyer that he forgot to eat. From time to time he exclaimed: "Ah! yes, I see. Now I understand this young man's low spirits."

But when the doctor got as far as the arrest of the Duke de Maillefert, and at the part probably played in it by Verdale, the lawyer exclaimed: "Raymond! Raymond! You simpleton, if you had only trusted me." And his brow grew dark. "Unfortunately," he continued, "what I could have done three months ago is impossible for me to do to-day. Raymond, do you remember that visit you paid me when you first came back to Paris? Do you remember that Verdale's son came in? He never acknowledged it, nor did I allow him to think I suspected it, but I am convinced now, as I was then, that it was his worthy father who sent him to me. Do you know what he came for? It was to implore me to give him a letter which I possessed—only ten lines long, but which made Verdale my abject slave. The young man expressed himself in words which seemed to spring straight from his heart, and a noble one too. He touched me and —"

"And what?" breathlessly asked the doctor.

"And I gave him the letter!"

Roberjot started up with such violence that the table was nearly overturned. "All is not lost," he cried; "no, I possess a weapon that my good friend Verdale does not even suspect. Decidedly there is a Providence which watches over honest people."

Raymond and the doctor would have liked to have had him explain himself more clearly, but, to all their questions, he would only say: "Patience! I don't want you to be disappointed again. I hope, but I am not by any means sure of my facts. Everything depends on a friend of mine who was a stock broker in 1852."

He then rang for his servant, had plates laid for Raymond and the doctor, and insisted on their sharing his meal. At eight o'clock the three men left table, and, entering a cab, they drove to the Rue Taitbout, where Roberjot's old friend resided. The lawyer went into the house alone, but he did not remain there more than ten minutes, and when he came out his face was radiant. "Victory!" he cried to the two young men. "We will now see Verdale. Driver—to No. 72 Avenue d'Antin?" he added, "and drive sharp."

IV.

It was in the Avenue d'Antin, in the centre of the Champs Elysées, that Verdale, the millionaire, now resided. He had built the palace of his dreams, the most magnificent of all the plans which had grown musty in his portfolio in the days when he was "unappreciated." Any one who glanced at the front of the house, one mass of ornamentation and sculpture, would have immediately said: "There lives a parvenu!"

Nine o'clock had just struck when the cab conveying Roberjot, Raymond, and Dr. Legris drew up before the door.

"The baron is certainly at home," answered the porter, "but I doubt if he will receive you. Apply to one of those footmen."

There were several lacqueys, in a most brilliant livery, lounging about the vestibule, and one of them said that his master was very much occupied but would perhaps see them if they would wait and take the trouble to follow him. They did follow him, and he led them up a stately marble staircase, and after conducting them through several magnificently furnished reception-rooms, ushered them into a small apartment, hung with green velvet and lighted by a single lamp. "Please be seated," said the servant, "and as soon as my master is disengaged he will send here and tell you so."

Roberjot frowned—all this ceremony annoyed him. "If Verdale knew what was in store for him," he muttered, "he would not keep us kicking our heels in this way."

A bright light came from under one of the velvet door hangings. Evidently, the door behind was open, and some one had just entered the next room. "That is probably the dear baron's study," thought the doctor. And as if to emphasize this supposition, a sharp commanding ring was heard, and as soon as steps were heard on the parquetry, some one asked, imperiously: "Where is the chevalier?"

"With Madame la Baronne," answered a humble voice.

"Go and tell him I wish to see him for a few minutes."

Roberjot leaned toward the doctor. "That is Verdale's voice," he said.

A silence of three or four minutes ensued. Then a door opened and shut, and the voice which Roberjot had said was that of his old companion, was heard again. "You know why I sent for you, chevalier?"

"I suspect the reason, my dear father," answered a full, well-modulated voice.

"I am extremely displeased."

"And I am far from satisfied."

Roberjot smiled. Now that he knew it was father and son in the next room, he found infinite amusement in hearing Verdale address his son in all seriousness as the "chevalier."

"Ah! you are not satisfied?" replied Verdale in a tone of intense irritation.

"I am not, indeed, sir."

"And why?"

"Because if I am not on my guard you will end by making me utterly ridiculous."

"I make you ridiculous?"

"Yes, sir."

"And how, if you please, how?"

"By persisting in calling me by the title of chevalier, to which I have no possible right. You, my dear father—you assume the title of baron; I deplore it, but I cannot prevent it. But, now, that you are trying to impose on me this ridiculous appellation of 'chevalier,' I desire to inform you that I will not bear it. And every time that in your notes of invitation you call me the Chevalier Verdale, I will do precisely what I did yesterday: I will send notes everywhere, saying that the word chevalier was a printer's blunder."

Raymond, Legris, and the lawyer looked at each other in considerable astonishment.

"My son, it strikes me that you are extremely philosophical," exclaimed Verdale, who was evidently losing his temper.

"I try to be," answered the young man.

"And you are a democrat, too, of course?"

"In a way, I am."

The architect stamped his foot. "You are proud of our origin?" he asked, sneeringly.

"And why not? Our ancestors were honest people, and that is all I care about. But if I had your ideas, father, and really wished people to forget my origin, I should not do my best to remind them of it. As long as you were only Verdale, nobody cared, or asked, whence you came or your parents either; but the very day you placed "baron" on your visiting card they took pains to ask who your father was. Then they went further, and they discovered what? That my grandmother—your mother—sold fish at the central markets."

"Lucien!"

"It's useless to deny it. I know twenty persons whom she always served; besides our name is still on a sign there. Go yourself and you can see it, 'Binjard, successor to Verdale.'"

"But no one would ever have known this but for you; you shouted it from the house tops."

"Excuse me; I boasted of it, as it were, so that I might not be laughed at. Dining with my friends, if I said, 'Give me some of that fish; I know when fish is good, for my grandmother used to sell it'—no one laughed at me; I was not ridiculous. But what should I be if some one maliciously remarked; 'Have some fish, chevalier? you ought to be a good judge of it.'"

Verdale interrupted his son with a terrible oath. "You are making a great mistake," he cried.

"And how?"

"It is a mistake to oppose me in this way. You have your own opinion, so be it; then have courage too. If you reject the title, be brave enough to reject the fortune which I place at your disposal—the one was to sustain the other."

"My dear father!"

"Select a profession—earn your own bread, and then you will have a right to your ideas and opinions. Until then——"

"But you know that it is your own fault if I have not done so long ago. You know that in remaining with you, under your roof, I have only yielded to the prayers and entreaties of my mother. You know, too, that I don't spend the fifth part of the income which your generosity has placed at my disposal."

"Say then—as you are so near it—that if I were to die, you would reject the fortune I should leave behind me."

There was a long pause, and then, in a voice that evinced considerable agitation, the young man slowly replied: "I would not accept it!"

The situation was a most awkward one for our three friends—for it was evident that their presence in the little room was quite unsuspected. "Are we to descend to this degradation?" muttered Raymond—"are we to steal the secrets of these people?"

"We should have some fine ones," murmured the doctor.

But Raymond's decision was taken and he calmly overturned a heavy chair. "They will hear that, I fancy!" he said, aloud.

Almost at the same moment the heavy, velvet door curtain, which separated the two rooms, was drawn aside, and the intelligent head and face of the younger Verdale appeared. He seemed utterly stupefied at the sight of these three men, and more stupefied still when he recognized the lawyer. "Monsieur Roberjot!" he cried.

At this name his father appeared, and for a moment he did not speak. His eyes wandered from his old friend to Raymond Delorge and then to Dr. Legris; in whom he recognized the person he had seen at Madame Lucy Bergam's. "How long have you been here, gentlemen?" he asked at last.

"About twenty minutes," replied the doctor, in the most urbane manner.

An oath betrayed the architect's indignation. "This is the manner in which my servants behave!" he cried. "This is the way they attend to their duties!"

He rushed to the bell-rope, and pulled it with such frantic vehemence that it came off in his hand. All the doors flew open, and in poured a number of servants.

"Who opened the door to these gentlemen?" asked Verdale, in a most threatening tone.

"It was I, sir——" replied one of the footmen, piteously.

"Did you not ask for their cards?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, why did you not bring them to me?"

"Because you were engaged, sir."

"Is that any reason why you should show visitors into one of the rooms without informing me?"

"But, sir——"

"That will do. You are no longer in my service. You will receive a month's wages and leave the house to-morrow morning."

Verdale was purple with rage. He gesticulated and shouted and went on like a madman. Roberjot, who knew him well, watched him calmly, and soon made up his mind that his anger was feigned, and that the whole scene was a little comedy enacted to gain time for resisting the attack which the architect saw was coming. When the servants had withdrawn, Verdale, indeed, suddenly changed his tone. "Excuse me, gentlemen," he said, "but this reproof and summary execution were absolutely essential. It is absolutely lamentable the way we are served nowadays." So speaking, he raised the velvet door-curtain again. "Do me the honour to walk this way," he added.

The room they now entered was M. Verdale's favourite apartment, the sanctuary to which he resorted for meditation, if not for prayer. It was there he always received his friends, and everything was arranged with the deliberate intention of dazzling the beholder, from the carpet to the ceiling, and to the splendid curtains of the three windows. In the most gracious way he rolled easy-chairs towards his guests, and then addressing his son: "I will release you now, Lucien," he said.

But this did not suit M. Roberjot. The conversation he had overheard between the father and son convinced him of the truth of his old suspicions—that they were not of the same opinion on many subjects. So he hastily rose: "I should be glad, my dear baron," he exclaimed, "if your son would consent to be present at our interview."

Verdale restrained a movement of impatience with difficulty. "Stay, then!" he said to his son.

And turning to his former friend, he continued: "Pray have the goodness to tell me to what I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

Roberjot had prepared a little speech—not so much what he wished to say, as the order in which he should bring matters forward. "These are the

facts," he began in a dry tone, "and I desire you to understand, my dear baron, that I speak in my own name as well as in the name of my friend, M. Raymond Delorge."

The architect bowed ceremoniously.

M. Roberjot then went on speaking slowly, emphasizing each word: "We have come in a friendly spirit to beg you to set the young Duke de Maillefert at liberty. We know, of course, that you have nothing to do with his arrest. We understand that he was arrested contrary to your wishes. Oh! certainly, for we know that you mentioned this fact in the presence of Dr. Legris. We know that the duke was arrested on a complaint preferred by the Count de Combelaïne."

Although Verdale had expected something of this kind, he grew very pale. "Unfortunately," he answered, "you over-estimate my influence. Now that the law has taken the affair in hand, I can do nothing. The duke, whether he be innocent or guilty——"

"You know better than anyone that he is not guilty," interrupted Roberjot, coldly; and then, with a gesture that imposed silence on the discomfited architect, he went on. "I have not finished. M. de Combelaïne wishes to marry Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, who is loved by Raymond Delorge, and who loves him. This marriage would be the death of this unfortunate girl, and so we have come—in a friendly spirit, you understand—to prevent this marriage."

Perhaps it was to conceal his agitation that Verdale now rose. "This is the sheerest folly," he cried.

Dr. Legris and Raymond hardly dared breathe, so fully did they realize the importance of each word exchanged by these two men. They scarcely looked at Lucien Verdale, who, very pale with compressed lips, stood leaning against the mantelpiece.

"We rely on you, baron," repeated Roberjot, after a long pause.

A spasm of anger contracted the features of the architect, and, in a hoarse voice, he said: "I can only repeat what I have just told you."

"What is that?"

"That it is folly to come and ask a man to interfere with matters which are no concern of his, and for which he really cares not one straw."

"Is that the truth?" asked Roberjot, in an ironical tone.

Verdale did not reply, and after a moment the lawyer continued: "Believe me, it is unwise to spend our time in disputing. An intrigue exists, and you are the prime mover in it. Do not deny it—it is useless. Who went to Rosiers to examine the property of the young heiress? Who was it who placed an enormous credit at the disposal of De Combelaïne, when twenty-four hours before he would not have lent him ten louis to save his life? Who was it who pushed poor Philippe to the edge of the precipice over which he rolled? Was it not you, M. Verdale? Then show me, if you please, that there is no connection between Combelaïne's marriage and the duke's arrest."

These accusations were preferred in two forcible a manner for Verdale to deny them. "And what if there were?" he finally asked.

"I have only to say," continued Roberjot, without answering this question, "that what you have done, you must undo. Now? Ah! that is not for me to say. Within forty-eight hours, however, you must see that the Duke de Maillefert is restored to liberty, and that M. de Combelaïne has renounced the hand—that is to say, the millions—of Mademoiselle Simone."

"I must! Did you say must?"

"Yes. Absolutely."

The architect took from his desk a paper knife, which, silver as it was, he twisted and broke in his convulsed, angry fingers. "You are mad, Roberjot, I tell you. If you are the friend of M. Delorge, I am the friend of M. de Combeldaine; I have sustained him, against everything and everybody."

The lawyer leaned forward in his chair. "Take care, M. Verdale," he said, "reflect a little before you commit yourself."

It was not the architect who replied. His son stepped forward, and said gently, but firmly: "No human being shall speak in that way to my father in my presence, and in his house."

So threatening was his attitude that Raymond and Legris started up. But Roberjot was one of those men whom nothing disconcerts, and who never lose their presence of mind. He at once saw the benefit he could derive from this interference, and quite pleased thereat, he answered: "I should not be driven to the necessity, sir, of threatening your father in this way, had you not urged me to give you a letter which would have insured my safety, and that of my friends."

The poor fellow's eyes dropped.

"Have you forgotten," continued the lawyer, pitilessly, "what happened on the day of your visit. What did you tell me? That you wished to marry a young girl whom you adored, and that your father had said he would never give his consent until he was in possession of a certain letter which I had obstinately refused to give him. And upon this you came to me, as you said, without his knowledge."

"Which was true, sir."

"Then what did I do? Moved by your grief and touched by your prayers, I said, 'Here, take the letter, I will give it to you;' and I did so—so that you might hand it to your father—and I placed it in a sealed envelope."

"It is true," murmured the young man, "it is true."

Anyone who knew Roberjot would have read in his eyes the certainty of success. "Undoubtedly," he continued, "you asked yourself the reason of this precaution. I will tell you, sir. I wished to spare you the terrible sorrow of despising your father." He stopped for a moment as if to allow his words to produce their full effect, and then continued more slowly: "You may therefore understand that I act to-day under the influence of inexorable necessity. It deeply pains me to afflict you, but I have duties to fulfil. I wish to save the honour of the Duke de Maillefert and the lives of his sister and my friend, Raymond Delorge. I have to defend the happiness of all the people I love, so I must speak."

"What do you mean, Sir?"

"Ask your father what that letter contained, and under what circumstances it was written."

The architect had grown deadly pale. "Roberjot!" he murmured, with parched lips.

"Do what I ask then," the lawyer replied.

Frightful indecision was apparent on Verdale's face. Then all at once he exclaimed. "No, I won't! It were better that my son should know the contents of that letter, that he should know it was but the simple admission of one of those reckless escapades which youth is so prone to."

"One of those reckless escapades has landed poor Philippe de Maillefert in prison."

Verdale tried to resist. "I do not admit the comparison," he said.

"And you are right," answered the lawyer in a tone of ironical politeness.

less. "I can recall the very words of your letter. I will repeat them and see if our friends will believe that you looked on the affair at that time as lightly as you do to-day: 'Friend Roberjot,' you wrote, 'if on the receipt of this letter you should show it to the public prosecutor, he would at once issue a warrant for my arrest. I should be judged and condemned. For I have appropriated, through a forgery, the title deed you intrusted to me.' And it was signed with your name, in full—Verdale."

Crushed by this terrible revelation, poor Lucien staggered to a chair.

But Verdale was above all this weakness. "It is true," he said, in a hoarse voice, "that, to my great misfortune, I borrowed one hundred and sixty thousand francs from you, for eight days. But you were my friend. Did I not repay you on the appointed day?"

"Yes."

"Did I not, moreover, offer you half of the immense amount which, thanks to Contanceau, I had just realized?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then—what more do you want? And why do you come here and insult me?"

Verdale, who had been so white, had recovered his habitual audacity with such suddenness that Raymond and Dr. Legris were petrified. The reason of this change, however, was a most simple one. The architect had always dreaded that his son should learn the ignominious source of his fortune. But Lucien knew it now—the apprehension was removed from his father's mind, and fate had done its worst—he had nothing more to dread.

"To any one but yourself, Roberjot," he continued, "I should say: We are quits; go your way, and I will go mine. But we—my old friend—we have an account to settle, an account that has been running eighteen years." As he spoke the colour had returned to his cheeks, and his voice grew fuller and more pompous. "Having faith in your friendship," he continued, "I most foolishly gave myself into your hands, bound hand and foot by that stupid letter, of which you have retained so exact a recollection. How did you reward my confidence? For eighteen years you held this fatal proof suspended over my head. I ceased to belong to myself—I had no will of my own. I was afraid to undertake anything. If an idea came to me, before I could decide on it, I was reduced to saying to myself, 'What will Roberjot think of it?' Were you not my master? For eighteen years, as I told you, I lived with the atrocious idea that there was a man who was my master in this world—a man who by one single act of his could overturn the edifice I had raised with such infinite labour—who could leave me without honour or money, and, moreover, rob me of my son's affection."

Lucien Verdale looked up. "Father!" he murmured.

But his voice was not heard. The architect continued with rapidly increasing excitement: "And it is of this man—this man, on whom you have inflicted such intolerable suffering and humiliation—that you, Roberjot, whom I have heard called clever, have come to ask a service. Have you lost your head? Don't you understand that it is my revenge you have offered me at last? Ah! you are interested in Philippe de Maillefert, are you? In Mademoiselle Simone and M. Raymond Delorge? Then that is quite sufficient reason for me to swear implacable hatred against them and against you. Merely because you execrate Combelaïne, I will remain his faithful and devoted friend. I will sustain him with my money and my credit. Now it is irrevocable. The Duke de Maillefert shall go to a convict's prison, and his sister shall marry the Count de Combelaïne."

His tone indicated such mortal hatred and such firmness, that Dr. Legris and Raymond could not help shuddering. But Roberjot was calm. "Take care, Verdale," he said coldly, "take care."

The architect was furious. "Take care! Why should I take care?" he exclaimed. "The time is past when your threats could make me tremble. That letter, which, for eighteen years you held like a knife at my throat, is no longer in existence. It is burned."

Roberjot slowly rose from his chair, and leaning on the back of it, quietly said: "Are you sure that this letter was the only proof against you?"

"I am, indeed."

"Allow me, then, to inform you that you are very much mistaken."

Verdale started—and his eyes wavered. But speedily recovering himself: "Fool that I am!" he cried, "not to see that you are trying to frighten me."

Roberjot shook his head. "Yes, you are foolish," he said, "not to understand that I should never have said to you, 'I insist' and 'you must' unless I had the means of compelling you. No; I have not lost my head. I knew your feelings towards me perfectly well." And without allowing the architect time to speak, he continued: "The letter in which you admitted your forgery is destroyed. Very well. But the forgery itself—where is that?"

"The forgery itself," stammered Verdale.

"Yes—listen to me—I will tell you its story. When I received that letter from you my first movement was to hurry to my broker's. How had he ventured to take such a step without consulting me? On investigation I learned the truth. You had forged an order from me to him, directing him to pay the whole amount of the sale over to you. When I saw the signature I was confounded, it was so like my own. The agent saw by my surprise that something was wrong. He questioned me. I might have denounced you, but I did not do so. I begged my friend, however, to preserve this forgery with the greatest care, telling him I might some day need it."

"Well?"

"I have just seen my friend. He has the document, and holds it at my disposal."

The architect bore up bravely under this blow, and drove away the sinister apprehensions which assailed him. "Do you call that a proof?" he finally asked.

"It would not be considered one, possibly in a court; besides you are safe through the statutes of limitation. But it will serve my purposes very well——"

The architect listened. He was trying to fully understand those new dangers.

"I shall call in your old friend Coutanceau, and if that's not enough, I can bring forward another witness——"

"And who may that be?"

"Your son."

Verdale started back as if he had seen a ghost. "And do you think," he cried, "that my son would raise his voice to accuse his father, and dishonour the name he bears?"

"I have his word," said Roberjot coldly. And addressing Lucien, he added, "Do you remember our agreement, when I gave you that letter?"

"Oh! sir," stammered the young man, "I remember it, but——"

"I said to you then in almost these words, 'Your father hates me. When

he knows me to be without weapons against him he will seek to be revenged.' Then what did you say? 'If ever my father attempts anything against you—you or your friends—I will stand beside you and against him, I give you my word of honour.' Did you not say this?"

"Yes; I said it."

"And if I summoned you to keep your word."

The young man hesitated and then in a husky voice replied: "I should keep it."

Verdale, on hearing these words, swayed to and fro and caught at the table. He seemed to be stifling; he gasped for breath, and tore his waistcoat open. "He would keep his word! He, my son!" And as the unfortunate young man went towards him, he repelled him, and with a superhuman effort turned to Roberjot: "You have won the day," said he, "I am in your power—do what you choose with me."

Dr. Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot were deeply moved; but the lawyer proceeded to take advantage of the situation. "You know me well enough, sir," he said, gently, "to be certain that I shall act only at the last extremity. I have no hatred against you; do what we ask of you—will you not?"

The architect shrugged his shoulders despairingly. "How can I?" he cried; and after a little reflection he said hastily: "Suppose, when you received that letter of mine, in which I denounced myself, suppose you had laid it before the authorities. What would have happened? I should have been arrested and a trial would have been ordered as soon as possible. Suppose that my wife had then come and thrown herself at your feet, entreating you to save me, what would you have said?"

"That it was too late, that the matter was out of my hands, and that I could do nothing."

"Very well; that is precisely my position."

"But Philippe de Maillefert is innocent."

"So he is to a certain extent. But not in appearance."

"An infamous snare had been laid for him."

"I do not deny it."

"You see then——"

"I see nothing. If forgeries exist, they are the work of M. de Maillefert, and so M. de Maillefert is a forgerer."

"Oh!"

"I simply use the words employed by M. Barban d'Avranchel."

Verdale was right, and Roberjot knew it. His contracted brows showed this. However, after a moment of meditation he went on: "Do you think that the duke knew what he was doing?"

"Oh! perfectly."

"Do you mean that he knew himself to be running the risk of a convict's cell?"

"No. He simply thought he appeared to risk it."

It was so difficult to reconcile these replies that Raymond and Legris looked at each other interrogatively. Roberjot himself was a little bewildered, but he presently said: "I do not doubt your sincerity, M. Verdale. But let us lay our cards on the table. Let us cease questioning, and you, tell us all you know."

Verdale hesitated. It was very evident that he was suffering acutely.

"Go on, father," said Lucien, gently.

Verdale started at these words. "To save myself here, is not necessarily to lose myself with the others," he muttered.

Then all at once his lips parted, and in the tone of a man who was utterly desperate: "You know as well as I," he began, "the situation of Madame de Maillefert and her son during the last few years. Ruined, head over heels in debt, they had not a farthing except what was given them by Mademoiselle Simone. But they were far from being grateful, for the income did not suffice them; they wanted the capital. They tried a score of times to induce the young lady to consent to their wishes; but they never succeeded. However, the Duchess de Maumussy came to their help. 'Suppose,' she said, 'that the duke formed or joined a company of some kind, some financial enterprise. Suppose Philippe, in order to raise money, could be induced to commit a forgery. Would not Mademoiselle Simone give her whole fortune to shield him from the consequences of his act? Of course she would. Very well, then; Philippe must pretend to do just what he is incapable of doing. He must be at the head of some company; he must pretend to have committed forgery, and he must fly to his sister and implore her to save him. She will give him everything he asks for, and the matter will be settled.'

"Knowing Simone's character as they did, the duchess and her son grasped at Madame de Maumussy's suggestion. But they could not execute this plan alone; they required assistants and accomplices, not so easy to find. But Madame de Maumussy helped them. Having supplied the idea, she felt herself called upon to supply the man—and this man was the Count de Combelaïne. Summoned by her, Combelaïne went secretly to Saumur, where his first interview with Madame de Maillefert and her son took place. As soon as he understood what was wished, he promptly said he would undertake the transaction, and answer for its success, providing they gave him Mademoiselle Simone's hand with a dowry which he fixed. We must do Madame de Maillefert the justice to say that she hesitated. This condition seemed frightfully hard, not for her daughter so much as for herself. She knew M. de Combelaïne, and the prospect of having him for a son-in-law was particularly disagreeable to her. Not daring to refuse point blank, she pleaded prior engagements of her daughter's and her own. She declared that Simone loved some one else—that she would never give her consent—that her character was too absolute to submit to advice or control. But De Combelaïne was not dismayed, he declared that he would undertake to obtain Simone's consent himself. So the treaty was finally signed, thanks to the Duchess de Maumussy, who had some especial enmity against Simone."

Verdale was evidently about to throw a strong light on this dark intrigue. It was with pale faces that Dr. Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot listened, forgetting the presence of Lucien Verdale, who stood by the chimney-piece, looking very much like a criminal before his judges.

"You see, of course," continued the architect, "that Combelaïne could not act alone. He came to me—and I assure you, on my honour, that the truth was not revealed to me. Had I ever suspected it, I should not be where I am now. But Combelaïne simply told me that some friends of his, a noble lady and her son were in trouble—from which he wished to release them—and, at the same time, to arrange his own marriage with a daughter of the same family. What he proposed to do, he said, was not altogether correct, but he added that, after all, there was no harm in it. In the end, I promised him my assistance."

Raymond here hastily intervened: "Do not forget your visit to Maillefert," he said.

But Roberjot nudged his elbow and checked his words. Was it not natural for M. Verdale to try and exculpate himself, and throw all this.

odious intrigue on his accomplices? And what did it matter whether he were a little less or a little more guilty?

"I went to Maillefert," replied the architect, "but only to assure myself that M. de Combelaïne had not deceived me, and that the affair he proposed to me was really a serious one. He had fooled me several times, he owed me a great deal of money, and I distrusted him. I told him, however, that up to a certain point I was at his disposal. He had often drawn me into speculations which necessitated delicate negotiations. I had had the imprudence to write to him, he had preserved all our correspondence, and often threatened me with it."

The architect began to wander from the point. "Let us get back to Philippe de Maillefert," said Roberjot, gently.

Verdale frowned angrily, but continued: "The fortune once ascertained, the execution of the plan was by no means difficult. I was then as I am now the head of a financial society, 'The Rural Bank.' Combelaïne was, and is, one of the directors. I nominated Philippe de Maillefert, first as a member of the council, next as one of the board. This position gave him certain opportunities of which he availed himself. Encouraged by Combelaïne—for he hesitated at the last moment—Philippe carried off about three million five hundred thousand francs' worth of title-deeds, etc., and concealed this abstraction by forged entries, which were as awkward and as authentic as possible. Was he a thief and a forgerer? Not in the usual sense of the word. His idea was that he was simply playing a part in a comedy enacted to deceive his sister, and he never dreamed of incurring the smallest possible risk. Nor did he attempt to dispose of these deeds, but left them in Combelaïne's hands. Whenever Combelaïne or the duke required any money, I advanced it. And when this was done Philippe started for Maillefert, there to play the great scene on which success depended, and which I felt to be utterly odious. But I had now gone too far to retreat. Taking his sister aside, Philippe told her that, in sore distress, harassed by gambling debts, and urged by treacherous friends, he had speculated on the Bourse and lost considerable sums which did not belong to him. He added that all must now be discovered, and that, preferring death to dishonour, he should blow out his brains if his sister did not come to his assistance. Simone never doubted her brother. She instantly declared that she would arrange everything, even if her whole fortune were sacrificed. So Philippe came back to us in high delight, saying: 'It is all right; my sister will be here to-morrow.'"

The uneasy glance which Verdale gave his son indicated that all he had said was as nothing to what was coming. "If Combelaïne had been a man like other people," he continued, "everything would have gone smoothly. Mademoiselle Simone sold out property to the amount of four millions, and our purpose was accomplished. But Combelaïne was not the person to renounce the fortune which, after this sacrifice, still remained in the young lady's hands. When she sent for him he told her that this business of the duke's was by no means so simple or so easily concluded. He would use all his influence to bring it to a happy conclusion, he added, on one condition, namely, that if he succeeded, Mademoiselle Simone would consent to become his wife. I was present at this scene, and nothing could equal the poor girl's horror. But, in the gentlest tone she replied that she no longer belonged to herself—having arranged her future. However, Combelaïne continued to insist, and so brutally and awkwardly, that Mademoiselle de Maillefert, wounded and angry, at last exclaimed, in a tone of the most

crushing contempt: 'I understand, sir—the millions that still remain to me excite your cupidity. Very well; save the honour of our house and you shall have them, but as to becoming your wife—never.'

"By this single sentence she made an enemy for life of a man who never forgets nor forgives. Before she said this, he only cared for her dowry—nothing for herself. But now the woman, quite as much as her fortune, became the object of his desires. 'That haughty creature,' he said to me, 'shall be my wife, or else her ducal brother shall go to a convict's cell!' I endeavoured to pacify him, but all in vain. And when, two or three days later, I threatened him, and said that I should go over to Mademoiselle Simone's side, he answered with a sneer: 'You are late in the day. I hold you under my thumb quite as securely as I hold Philippe. You don't suppose, do you, that I have allowed all those papers to get mouldy in my drawer? I did my best to get ten thousand francs from you, but you refused. I had creditors. Draw your own inferences!'"

Did Verdale speak the truth? At all events his voice was wrathful, and seemed to indicate the natural indignation of a man who knows himself to have been duped. "The count's sarcasms opened my eyes even more than his threats," he continued. "I understood that I had been fooled and made a tool of by one of those traitors who, for a very small consideration, do not hesitate to betray their companions. I discovered that his intention was to get possession of this poor girl's entire fortune, and that he would never return the deeds which had been entrusted to him, and for which poor Philippe would sooner or later pay with his honour and liberty."

Lucien Verdale, who had been looking at his father in a kind of stupor, now interrupted, in a hoarse tone; "But this is monstrous!"

"Yes, monstrous," repeated the architect. "But Combelaïne held me tight. Had he not my correspondence in his mistress's keeping—and, besides, such was the position of the Rural Bank that a disturbance, a public scandal, would have brought bankruptcy on my head at once."

"It is disgraceful," muttered Lucien. "Oh! I don't pretend to excuse myself," continued his father. "I merely wish to explain why I stood and gazed with folded arms at the horrible drama enacted at the Maillefert mansion. Debased as were the characters of the duchess and her son, they were not altogether so heartless as to witness the poor girl's agony unmoved. They began to realize that this marriage would be her death, and tried to dissuade De Combelaïne. Then when they saw that he was unmoved by their entreaties, they ended by declaring that they would withdraw their consent. 'Just as you please,' he replied, coldly; 'but in that case France will have the pleasure of seeing something strange—the Duke de Maillefert standing in the criminal's dock. However, as I am not utterly hard-hearted, I grant you forty-eight hours for reflection!' I was there, and I assure you that had I seen any way of aiding these people I should have done so. But I was threatened as well, and it was with a bitter sense of my own powerlessness that I looked on at the scene which followed Combelaïne's departure. Philippe himself was wild with grief and anger. He is not altogether corrupt, this young fellow. He is headstrong and thoughtless, but the situation to which he had reduced his sister awoke in him every manly, honourable instinct which had been lying dormant. He swore that this marriage should never take place, and declared, as it was he who had been the first and only one to do wrong, he alone would bear the penalty. He knew, he said, that Combelaïne would not listen to him, and so he should blow out his brains."

"Were I to live for centuries I shall never forget the tone in which Mademoiselle Simone replied to her brother: 'If your death, Philippe, would save your honour, I myself would load your pistols. But your death would not end the matter. People would still say that a Duke de Maillefert had been a thief and forgerer. And this must not be. No; you must not raise your hand against yourself. I shall do my duty!' As for the Duchess de Maillefert she was wild with rage. Without understanding as I did Combelaïne's entire game, she saw that if her daughter's fortune ever became his, he would keep it for himself alone. She found herself caught in her own net. For, to allow Simone to be robbed of the millions, the income of which she had always enjoyed, meant ruining herself irretrievably—leaving herself without a farthing. Perhaps it was this that decided her to disclose the facts to her daughter; to tell her that Philippe was only guilty in appearance, that the theft and forgery were, in the beginning, only a most unworthy ruse. The poor young girl was revolted by this revelation, and I heard her sob that to feign a crime was in her eyes worse than to have committed it.

"Meanwhile, before taking any decisive steps, she adopted an idea that I suggested, and which was, that they should try and interest the Duchess de Maumussy in their cause. I knew that Combelaïne had rewarded the duke and the duchess with mere promises for the help they had given him, and that he had taken no pains to keep his promises. I believed that they were very discontented with him, and I hoped to take advantage of their displeasure. However, I was mistaken; for Combelaïne seeing my hesitation, and suspecting that I might fail them at the last moment, had secretly compromised with the Maumussys, and presented them with some of the documents stolen from the Rural Bank. And time had only added increased bitterness to the hatred the duchess felt for Simone. When the De Mailleferts understood this, the following note was received from Mademoiselle Simone:—'I am waiting to see you,' she wrote. 'On one condition—which I will tell you—I will consent!'

"The condition was that, before the marriage, the deficit of the Rural Bank should be made up, and that everything should be destroyed which could directly or indirectly tend to criminate her brother. Combelaïne promised all she desired, with the deliberate intention, as he told me, of breaking his promises. I could, therefore, only heartily approve of Philippe's step, when he declared that he had but one choice, and that was to compel Combelaïne to fight him. Unfortunately, the poor boy had neither the patience or the ability to carry out this design. One evening Combelaïne said to him: 'I have come to tell you that if you challenged me, I should at once send your letter to the public prosecutor. I intend to marry your sister, and we must be friends. Do you understand?'"

On hearing this a bandage fell from Raymond's eyes. He now understood the contradictions in Simone's conduct—her tears and indignation—her alternate hope and despair.

Drawing a long breath, Verdale continued: "I have told you all these facts abruptly, but of course you understand that their development was gradual, and that Combelaïne advanced with the most adroit management and hypocrisy. For instance, he kept the De Maillefert mansion going with money that he lent. The expenses of the duchess and her son were something enormous, in spite of their precarious position and melancholy anticipations. So it came to pass that these people, who hated each other so intensely, seemed to be on the most excellent terms. They were polite in

their daily intercourse, and were often seen together in public. Made-moiselle Simone, among the various conditions she made, had stipulated that she should not be obliged to receive De Combelaine until the day of the marriage. She never left her apartments, and it was only through the talk of one of her maids that we knew her health to be seriously affected. This exasperated Combelaine to such a degree that I asked myself if it were possible that he, who had never really loved any one, could now be passionately in love with this girl? At least the idea of her dying with grief because she was to be his wife filled him with rage. Sometimes, in speaking of her, he used the most violent and opprobrious epithets, and sometimes he declared that he would give millions to be in the place of Raymond Delorge. 'No matter,' he cried, 'she will be mine, all the same!'

"The wedding day was not yet fixed, and I was astonished to see Combelaine, near as he was to his triumph, so very gloomy and preoccupied. Whenever I asked what this meant, his reply was invariably, 'Nothing!' And when I asked why he did not hasten his marriage, he shrugged his shoulders and answered, 'Because!' A letter which reached me from Flora Misri at last explained this enigma. This woman, who for twenty years had been Combelaine's slave, and whom Coutanceau and I had amused ourselves with enriching, did not wish her lover to marry. He had sworn to her that she should be his wife, and she declared that she would compel him to keep his promise. She wrote to me with the hope of interesting me in her cause, telling me that she had all Combelaine's papers, that she would make them public, and, adding, that among these papers there were several letters of my own, which were particularly compromising. I knew that what she said was true, for these very letters were the sole cause of my compliance with Combelaine's plans. So I hastened to see the count, and with him I found the Duke de Maumussy and the Princess d'Eljonsen, both compromised in the same way, and both threatened by Flora with the publication of their correspondence in the newspapers.

"However, Combelaine's calmness and scornful air reassured us. He declared that there was really no danger, for Flora belonged to him so entirely, and was so utterly his slave, that she would never dare to put her threats into execution. Still this certainly did not prevent him from taking proper precautions. Flora was watched night and day, by half-a-dozen of the most skilful private detectives, who were ordered—at the least appearance of danger—to obtain possession of these papers even by force, if it were necessary. Finally he gave us his word of honour not to marry until he had all these letters and papers safely in his desk again. I went off somewhat quieted, when a most unexpected circumstance put me on the *qui vive* once more. The Duchess de Maillefert, who had so far been as submissive as possible to Combelaine, now became very restless. Combelaine spoke one morning of fixing the day for the marriage. 'Oh, there is no hurry!' she said; 'we will discuss it later.' She said this in so singular a tone, that when I was alone with Combelaine I alluded to it. He laughed at me at first, but when I persisted, he confessed that he was by no means at ease respecting it, and that he was greatly harassed on all sides. He imagined some enemy to be at work, and had begun to suspect his valet, Leonard, who had so far been in his full confidence.

"And what enemy had he bold enough, or persistent enough, to attack him now, except Raymond Delorge, whose father he had killed, and whose betrothed he had stolen? 'But he shall repent of his boyish meddling!' he said

fiercely, 'for I hold the proof of his connection with a secret society which will send him to prison, or Cayenne, whenever I say the word.' Still, despite his apparent confidence, the count was not easy in mind, for he said he should go and see Flora, obtain the letters, and then marry at once. The next morning he came in looking like death, and in a husky voice, he gasped : 'We are lost ! The papers are stolen !'

After beginning with rage and resistance, Verdale now seemed willing to make a clean breast of it, and resign himself to the situation. He watched his son out of the corner of his eye, and tried to read on the faces of the three friends what impression was made by his fluent eloquence. He continued as follows : "There is no need of describing my fright on hearing that all our correspondence was in the hands of an enemy. I felt that there was but one resource—flight ! Ten years ago this would not have been necessary, for the empire was strong enough to protect its servants—to prove their innocence or throw the indulgent veil of forgetfulness over their peccadilloes. But in 1870, under the Ollivier Ministry—which one day pelted the working-classes with mud, and in the next breath sang the praises of honesty, its charms and its advantages, with a patronizing air—it was difficult to know whom to trust, or what to lean on.

"My advice was, to take to our heels and await events in Belgium. Combelaïne, however, was always as obstinate as a mule, and he declared that he would not yield one inch—that audacity alone could save us now. Audacity ! He must have found it very difficult to talk in this way, for the very night before his valet, Leonard, had left him to join the service of an Englishman, and everything indicated that this sudden step concealed some treason. No matter. Combelaïne declared that the game was still in our own hands, and that by a most lucky chance he knew when and by whom these papers had been stolen. 'The author of this bold blow was Raymond Delorge,' he said : 'Fortunately,' he continued, 'he is in my power, and this very night, his account will be settled.'"

"And," interrupted Roberjot, "that very evening some spadassine attacked Raymond and injured him severely."

Did Verdale know this ? One would have said not, by the manner in which he raised his arms to Heaven. "Combelaïne," he cried, "is stronger than I thought, for he never gave me the smallest hint of this cowardly crime ! The very next day he dragged me into the presence of Madame de Maillefert, and signified to her that he must marry her daughter with the briefest possible delay. 'People are not generally married in Lent,' she answered, gravely ; 'but as you are the master, you must do as you choose.' I have hardly seen Combelaïne since that day, as he has been so occupied in purchasing the wedding presents, which he wishes to be more magnificent than anything ever seen before ; but when I have had a moment's chat with him, he has hastily said that things would go on smoothly. Delorge had the letters no doubt, but could not use them, so strictly was he watched. I was therefore, utterly thunderstruck when I heard last night, through my son, that Philippe de Maillefert had been arrested."

Calm as Verdale was in appearance, he was, in reality growing very nervous, for he was clear-headed enough to see that the most difficult moment of the explanation was yet to come.

"And so," began Roberjot, "you did nothing towards the arrest of the duke ?"

Verdale, with an indignant gesture, replied : "Do you doubt me ?"

"I——" began Dr. Legris,

"Then I have explained myself badly, gentlemen, very badly. Don't you see that throughout this deplorable affair I have been most outrageously imposed upon and sacrificed?"

"I don't see that."

"Yes, sacrificed, for Combelaïne cannot injure the duke without injuring me. Ever since this arrest I have felt as if I were going mad. It may have the most disastrous consequences. Philippe stands next to me in the Rural Bank, but as he is under me, the responsibility of his appointment falls on me. I shall be examined and cross questioned until all my most secret affairs are known."

This was plausible enough.

"And yet," asked Roberjot, "how does it happen that when De Maillefert was arrested he sent to you as well as to Combelaïne, to say that he consented to everything?"

"Because he thinks me the accomplice of Combelaïne."

"What is it he consents to?"

"I have no idea—on my word of honour—I can only say," the architect added, after a brief pause, "that four days ago the marriage was as firm as ever, so firm that I agreed to let the duchess have thirty thousand francs for Mademoiselle Simone's outfit. The same evening, however, Combelaïne was so displeased with the manner in which the duke had treated him that afternoon, that he said to me: 'This idiot adopts a tone that I won't stand. I think he is meditating some grand stroke.' I told him if he wanted to get the upper hand of the young man, he had only to refuse to give him money. 'The deuce of it is,' he replied, 'that he has plenty of it, and for the life of me, I can't understand where he gets it from.'"

Legris, Raymond, and Roberjot exchanged a quick glance. One name was on the lips of all three—that of Laurent Cornevin.

"I admit your explanations, my dear sir," said Roberjot ceremoniously, "only I don't see that there can be any mystery about the young duke's having money, as you say that Mademoiselle Simone has sold all her property?"

"But," replied the architect, with visible embarrassment—"But——"

"Did Mademoiselle Simone keep the proceeds of the sale of her estate?"

"I don't say that."

"Then where are they? We know that she has sold her property through the Baron de Boursonne, and it is through him, too, that we heard you were the purchaser."

Verdale started. "Excuse me, I did buy the land, but not in my own name. I bought it in the name of the Rural Bank, as I believed it would be a safe investment for the funds of that concern."

"That was very generous on your part, but whether the purchase was made in your name or that of the Rural Bank, you paid, I presume, and where is that money?"

Verdale became more and more agitated. "Nothing has been paid yet, for Combelaïne wished to retain his power over Philippe—a power which he would have lost if the duke had covered the deficit."

Roberjot nodded with cheerful acquiescence. But to himself he murmured: "What new villainy are we going to unearth here?"

Such, too, was Lucien Verdale's opinion, for he started forward. "De Combelaïne is a villain!" he exclaimed; "but you, my dear father, you will return what De Maillefert abstracted to the Rural Bank to-morrow."

"Three million five hundred thousand francs?"

"What does the amount matter?"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Verdale, now livid with anger and fear. "That would do no good. Don't you understand that it was certificates and bonds that were stolen? And, besides, where should I get three million five hundred thousand francs from?"

"You are very rich, and if it were to take your whole fortune, this must be done. You understand what I say—it must be done—even if I, your own son, be compelled to come forward to testify against you. I may be the son of a dishonest man, but I will not be his accomplice."

"He will do as he says!" muttered the architect. "I know Lucien—he means it." And then with sudden violence, he burst forth: "You are like all the others, Lucien. You think me rich. Poor simpleton! Did ever a millionaire play the desperate game I have played, and which will perhaps throw me into a convict's cell? I was a millionaire once—I am so no longer. You look at me as you did not believe me. You ask what I have done with my fortune? I don't know. It went as it came. My speculations and investments have recently turned out badly. I lost my head, and lost my money. It is the story of us all—the men of the second empire, as we are called. Look at those we know—those whose prosperity has been most dazzling. Combelaïne stole with a gauntleted hand, Maumussy owes ten millions, the Princess d'Eljonsen resorts to the most revolting devices in order to keep up a semblance of luxury. If I stand firm as yet, to all appearance, it is because no one suspects my real situation. But open the window and proclaim it; and by to-morrow I should have nothing more to do but to start for Belgium and join the millionaires who have lost every halfpenny by disastrous speculations. We are all tottering, and we can get no help from the empire. The empire!" Why, it has given us all it has to give, and now that the strong boxes are empty, and there is nothing to pour into the eager hands which are held out, the empire will perish, crumble into dust—and no one knows this better than the ministers, the prefects and the emperor!"

Lucien Verdale's features betrayed astonishment and dismay. As long as he had believed his father to be wealthy, he had relied on a great pecuniary sacrifice bringing things right at last. But now! "Monsieur de Maillefert must, nevertheless, be rescued," he said, firmly.

The architect angrily replied: "Why do you repeat those words in that senseless way? Have I not laid the whole situation before you? Is it on me that the duke should rely, when I am quite as much involved as himself?"

"On whom, then, should he rely?"

"On whom? Why on the man who has Combelaïne's papers in his possession. On M. Raymond Delorge."

These words betrayed the secret of Verdale's feeble resistance. He believed that Raymond had these important papers in his possession.

"Then, according to you," said Roberjot, "M. Delorge is master of the situation?"

"Absolutely."

"How is that?"

Verdale shrugged his shoulders. "You can answer that question as well as I can," he replied.

This would have been true if Raymond had had the papers; but such was not the case, and to allow Laurent Cornevin to be suspected would have been a fatal mistake. So the lawyer found himself in a most delicate position. "No matter what I know," he answered, "but if you have no objection give me your ideas."

"I have none. I have nothing to fear from Combelaine now. And it strikes me that these papers place these people in your power. Threaten them with the publication of their correspondence and they will move heaven and earth. Still justice, you know, does not easily relinquish its prey, and M. Barban d'Avranchel is a most determined man. But the government would never allow so many of their own people to be compromised, particularly as that would hasten their own fall."

Roberjot thought the same. "So then," he said, "you think the whole affair can be stopped just where it is if the deficit were made up?"

Verdale hesitated, and then suddenly exclaimed: "Combelaine may not have disposed of all the certificates and bonds!"

"It is best not to count on that."

"Well, then, I, as chairman of the Rural Bank, and through the claim I have on a portion of Mademoiselle Simone's estate, might advance the date of payment for it."

Roberjot looked at his old school-friend as if anxious to read his very soul. "Would you do that?" he asked.

"And you," said the architect, "would you in return promise to restore me any letters of mine which are among these papers of Combelaine's?"

Unfortunately Roberjot could not give this promise, and he was trying to avoid a decisive reply, when Lucien Verdale interfered. "Be easy, gentlemen," he said, in a firm voice; "my father will do all that an honourable man should do without any conditions whatever."

Neither Raymond nor Dr. Legris, nor even M. Roberjot had any occasion to linger longer with the architect. They therefore took their leave, escorted to the door by Lucien, who told them that his father would do what they desired.

Verdale listened until not a sound of their steps could be heard. Then he rang the bell with a strange expression on his face. His own valet, a man who had served him for fifteen years, and whom he believed to be devoted to his interests, appeared. "Have you finished all your preparations?" asked the architect.

"I have forgotten nothing," answered the servant. "I have filled fifteen huge boxes, which I have placed in a store-house, hired under a feigned name."

Verdale smiled. "Then," he said, "to-morrow you will convey your boxes to the railway station, and proceed to Brussels with them. You will wait for me there. It is time to take to our heels."

V.

THE clock struck twelve as Raymond and his two friends left Verdale's sumptuous mansion. The doctor went out first in order to reconnoitre, and he was so extremely prudent that he even crossed the street to look into two particularly dark doorways. This was no time for rashness. He knew—they all knew—that Raymond's life hung on a thread. Persuaded finally that the street was deserted, the doctor made a sign to his companions to join him, and, as the weather was fair, they walked to the Champs Elysées, which was silent and deserted at this hour.

The interview which had just taken place had been so different to what they had anticipated, and had opened before them such a new horizon, that they wished to exchange their views and decide on the course to adopt.

Roberjot thought that it would be infinitely better for Raymond to disappear entirely. "Your cause, my dear fellow," he said, "is evidently in the hands of an able man, who has such means at his command that he is able to buy Combelaïne's valet and Madame Flora's household. Let him work in his own way, and don't expose him to the additional worry of watching over you at the same time, or the risk of being defeated just as he reaches the result he has been striving to achieve for so many years."

Dr. Legris entirely agreed with the lawyer. "Besides," he said, "you need have no anxiety. Verdale told you what could be done with those papers. You may be sure that Laurent Cornevin will know how to use them. Philippe is in prison, to be sure, but he will be released. Combelaïne's marriage is fixed, but it will never take place." And as Raymond did not speak, Dr. Legris exclaimed, impatiently: "What can you hope to do? What could you do, when you may be arrested at any moment?"

"I can prevent the marriage."

"In what way? By killing Combelaïne, you mean?"

"Yes, if there is no other way."

"Well, there is plenty of time for that when we are certain that there is nothing else to be done. And in the meanwhile look out that you are not landed in prison."

When they reached the Place de la Concorde, Raymond had yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and agreed that he would conceal himself in Dr. Legris's rooms while waiting for an opportunity to make a safe retreat. They exchanged a last shake of the hand, and when Roberjot crossed the Pont de la Concorde to return to the Rue Jacob, Raymond and the doctor went towards Montmartre. They went at a quick step along the deserted streets, turning innumerable corners and constantly looking round to see that they were not followed. They were very much astonished that Combelaïne did not watch the man whom he believed to be in possession of his correspondence, with more vigilance.

"Is it a snare?" said the doctor to himself.

When they reached the Place du Théâtre, where Dr. Legris resided, he redoubled his attention, and his vigilance was not lost, for suddenly he pressed his companion's arm. "There is my house," he said; "look."

Raymond obeyed, and in front of the house he saw a tall man walking up and down, with that unmistakable air of a person who had been waiting a long time and is beginning to grow impatient. "It is Krauss!" cried Raymond.

"At this hour?" asked the doctor. "Are you sure?"

"Oh, perfectly." And he called: "Krauss!"

The old soldier started, looked round, and when he saw the two young men, he hurried towards them. "At last!" he said. "I was beginning to despair."

"What is the matter?" asked Raymond, anxiously.

"Monsieur Jean Cornevin is in London, and has telegraphed that he will be here at the end of the week."

"Ah!"

"And one of your friends, the Baron de Boursonne, is very anxious to see you. He says he can do you a great service. I told him I should know to-morrow how he could get at you."

"He is a firm friend—give him the address of Dr. Legris."

But the doctor knew there was something more than this. "I told you, my good fellow, not to come here except at the last extremity."

"Yes, sir, and there is something else now. Only as it was such a particular thing I did not know——"

"You can speak before the doctor," said Raymond.

The faithful servant hesitated for a second; and then he said, in a low voice: "A young lady, sir, has been to see you."

"A young lady?"

"Yes, sir; she was very pretty, but she looked frightened to death. I think you must have spoken to her of me—for she knew me. Let me tell you all about it. I was just going to bed when the concierge came up, and said somebody wanted to see me. I went down and I found two ladies. The younger one said, hastily, that she wanted to see you at once, that your life and her's depended on it. I was considerably embarrassed. But she begged me so hard to take her where she could see you, that I——"

"You brought her?"

"Yes, sir; and she is just round the corner in a cab."

Raymond uttered an exclamation, and dashed off towards the vehicle which stood in the shade. It was Simone de Maillefert who was waiting for him, with her governess, Miss Lydia Dodge. Simone heard his step, and recognized it, for she leaned out of the window. "You!" he said; "you! Here at this hour!"

"Why should I heed hours now?" she answered, in that quick, harsh voice, natural to those who are conscious of mortal peril. "What have I to fear or love now? I was obliged to see you, and I came. You received my letter, did you not?"

"I received it, and fail to understand what I have done to merit it."

"I was mad when I wrote it. But why did you not answer it?"

"If you knew what I had been doing you would not ask that question——"

"I do know. You are mixed up with conspirators; you are discovered, and you are in concealment."

They spoke without the slightest precaution, so that the driver, considerably puzzled by the words he caught, slyly alighted from his box and approached the window. Fortunately, Krauss and Dr. Legris were watching. They called the driver, under the pretext of wanting a light for their cigars, and kept him far enough away from the vehicle so that he could hear nothing.

"When your letter reached me," said Raymond, "I had not heard of the terrible misfortune——"

"Which I would have averted at the price of life itself! A Duke de Maillefert accused of robbery—accused of forgery!"

She was sublime in her indignation. Never had Raymond loved her so passionately; never had he so fully realized that life without her was impossible. "But your brother is not guilty!" he cried.

Simone looked at him. "How did you know?" she asked.

"I know that all your brother did was, in his eyes, a pure fiction. It was you only whom he intended to pillage and deceive."

Simone hid her face in her hands, and sobbed convulsively. "Alas!" she said, "the odious farce he fancied he was enacting is more odious than the crime itself. This is his punishment. My mother went to see him, but the jailers refused to open his door for her. And yet it is possible that the crowning disgrace of a trial may be avoided. It is for that I came. Can I rely on your aid?"

"My body and soul belong to you—you know that."

"I believe it, and it is that belief which gives me courage to say to you: Raymond, my best beloved, sacrifice for me the sacred memory of your murdered father—the hopes of your whole life—your legitimate vengeance—"

"What do you mean?" he stammered, faint and sick at heart.

She leaned toward him. "Give me those papers," she whispered, "those papers that belonged to M. de Combeldaine."

"Gracious heavens!" he exclaimed.

She misunderstood the meaning of his exclamation, for she added, with her hands clasped in an agony of supplication: "I know the extent of the sacrifice, Raymond. With these papers—for he told me so himself—you can ruin Combeldaine and all his associates. But do you know what he promises me in exchange? For my brother, a restoration of his forfeited honour, and liberty for myself. You hear," she continued, "liberty—liberty to dispose of my own hand. If not—as the honour of the house of De Maillefert must be preserved—I shall marry this man on Tuesday next."

"On Tuesday?"

"Yes, it is a settled thing. And De Combeldaine has arranged matters so adroitly that no one knows it."

Then Raymond cried out desperately: "But I have not got them. I don't possess those papers which would be our salvation."

Truth was in his tone, and Simone sank back in the carriage. "All is over, then," she murmured. "And yet, they were carried off. Who has them?"

The name of Laurent Cornevin was on Raymond's lips, but he had the courage—courage almost superhuman under the circumstances—not to utter it. "I don't know," he replied.

It was easy to see what it cost Simone to renounce the hope by which she had been sustained. "But Combeldaine," she said, "thinks you have these letters, for it was he who sent me to you."

"He sent you?"

"He told me, moreover, that it was owing to him that you were not yet arrested."

"Not yet arrested! Excuse me—but was it in your mother's presence that he gave you this advice?"

"No; he even begged me to conceal it from her."

Raymond caught at this gleam of light. "Combeldaine distrusts your mother, then. And why? What does she say to you of this marriage?"

"Nothing. After several days of intense depression, she all at once regained her carelessness. Even my brother's arrest did not depress her. Sometimes I have asked myself if she is in full possession of her reason. In talking about Philippe, she says: 'Nonsense! It will all come right, and to me, 'You are not yet married. Even at the mayor's door you need not renounce hope.'"

Raymond reflected. "This indifference," he thought to himself, "can only prove that the duchess and Cornevin understand each other. Have they a decisive blow in reserve?" And then he added aloud: "I will be more explicit than your mother, Simone, and I swear to you that you shall never marry that man."

"What do you hope to do, then?"

He gently replied. "Allow me to keep my secret a little longer."

The driver was summoned, mounted his box, and gathered up his reins, while Simone said, in a low, faint voice: "Farewell, Raymond! My last

hope is gone. It has sustained my strength for a few hours. And now I must tell M. de Combelaïne the result of this interview with you."

"At this hour."

"Yes; he must be awaiting my return before our house in his brougham. God have pity on us."

Then extending her hand to Raymond, who pressed it to his lips, she said once more: "Farewell."

"Until Tuesday," murmured Raymond, as the cab drove off, and almost immediately Dr. Legris' honest voice was heard in his ear.

"Well, you are pleased, I trust? This step strikes me as pretty significant."

"Did you hear what she said?"

"Not a word. Nor did Krauss."

"No, sir," and the old soldier touched his hat.

"But it does not need any excessive brilliancy to know that she came for the papers which Combelaïne thinks you took from Flora Misri."

"Precisely, that's what she came for, and if I had the papers——"

"You would have given them to her?"

"Instantly."

The doctor took off his hat and made a profound bow. "My compliments to you! Fortunately these blessed papers are in firmer hands than yours and will not escape from them until the right moment."

"Not until too late, probably. Do you know that the wedding is fixed for Tuesday?"

"What does that prove? Simply that Laurent Cornevin is master of the situation, and that he will be ready."

"But if he is not?"

"Then I shall be the first to say: Take the matter into your own hands. But I am not afraid. Cornevin is on the lookout."

Dr. Legris had been absent all day with Raymond, and it is not with impunity that a physician, with a practice like his, steals so many hours for his own affairs. Twenty patients had called, and some of them had returned three or four times; and he could read their names on a slate which lay on his table. But it was not this which attracted his attention. On his table lay a folded paper all by itself, as if to indicate its importance. It was, in fact, a summons to appear before the investigating magistrate, M. Barban d'Avranchel, in his private office, but without the least indication why.

"Barban d'Avranchel! is not that the magistrate who has poor Philippe's case in hand?" asked the doctor.

"Yes," replied Raymond, "and it is he, too, who, at the time of my father's death, managed the inquest, and carried Combelaïne out triumphantly."

This summons puzzled Legris so much that he could hardly close his eyes, and at daybreak he walked into Raymond's room, and said:

"I would give ten louis this minute if it were time to present myself before this M. Barban d'Avranchel."

He saw a number of patients, and at nine o'clock was ready to make his round of visits, of which he selected the most pressing ones.

"I shall try to find an asylum for you," he said to Raymond, "for we must run no risks. As soon as Combelaïne knows that you have not got the papers, he will have you arrested." And as Raymond began to thank him, he added: "Never mind that now. To-day I haven't a second to spare. I

must go at once to Batignolles to prepare a place for Madame Flora. But don't show yourself to anyone here. My servant, who has her orders, will not allow anyone to come in except the Baron de Boursonne, whom you expect."

Less than half an hour had elapsed after the doctor's departure, when the servant opened the door, and said, mysteriously: "This is the gentleman, sir."

At the same moment M. de Boursonne brushed passed the woman, and exclaimed: "Here you are at last. Do you know that I made this journey for your sake alone. I bring you some great news."

Surprising, indeed, was the intelligence brought from Anjou by the old nobleman. A fortnight after Raymond's departure, huge yellow placards had burst out all over walls and fences, announcing the sale by auction of the De Maillefert property. The conditions of the sale were so peculiar, that everybody was astonished at the awkwardness of the men who had this important business in hand. The baron made up his mind at once that this awkwardness was intentional, and intended to drive away purchasers, and would, therefore, tend to the disposal of the property at two-thirds of its value. "Who could profit by this manoeuvre?" This question the baron at once applied himself to solve. "A Parisian—a certain Baron Verdale—had announced that he had determined to buy everything belonging to Mademoiselle Simone in the name of the Rural Bank, a flourishing financial concern, of which he was the chairman. The most moderate calculations set down the profits of this Verdale at a million or fifteen hundred thousand francs. People admired his cunning and skill, but all at once a rumour arose. After the sale had taken place, during the forty-eight hours' grace that elapse before it is final, a stranger—an Englishman—appeared at the notary's office, and claimed the legal privilege of the highest bidder, insisting on the surrender of the property to him, or on a new sale taking place. "To write all this would have been too long, my dear Delorge," said the baron in conclusion. "So I preferred to come and tell it, and at the same time enjoy your astonishment."

But Raymond was not astonished. Verdale's reticence the evening before had prepared him for the discovery of any manoeuvres, destined to throw part of Mademoiselle de Maillefert's property into the architect's hands. And as to the Englishman who had appeared so opportunely on the scene, with his millions in his hand, who could he be, except Laurent Cornevin?

This was also the baron's idea, when Raymond laid the position of things before him. They then proceeded to calculate the consequences of these events, when all at once the door was thrown open and Dr. Legris entered, out of breath from having run up three stairs at a time, and quite radiant with joy. "Victory!" he cried; "Victory! This time Combeldaine won't escape!" But he stopped short, for he saw the old engineer, whom he had not at first perceived.

"Go on!" said Raymond; "this gentleman is the Baron de Boursonne, from whom I have no secrets."

Dr. Legris complied. "I have just come from M. Barban d'Avranchel," he said, "and through him I learned—but let me begin at the beginning."

He then dropped onto a chair and wiped his forehead. "I was punctual," he said; "and precisely at five minutes to one I presented myself at the Palais de Justice, with my summons in my hand. I was kept waiting some ten minutes, and was beginning to feel impatient, when I saw—well come! whom do you think I saw appear?"

"Combeldaine!" cried Raymond.

"No; a fellow practitioner—Dr. Buiron. Was he delighted to see me? By no means. On the contrary, he exclaimed: 'What the deuce are you here for?' 'I am waiting my turn for examination,' I said, 'and you?' 'I!' he answered; 'oh, I was summoned by the magistrate, and heaven only knows what for.' I assure you I was never so much astonished in my life, but I said with a laugh: 'You must have committed some crime.' He turned deadly pale—and then, merely to annoy him, I added: 'Or, if you haven't committed one yourself, you have helped somebody else.'

"My little jest did not seem to amuse him; however, he looked very embarrassed. Just then the door of the magistrate's private room opened and a man came out. I recognized him at once as that fellow Grollet who was once a groom at the Elysée stables. He now has a large livery establishment of his own, and is very well off. I saw him the other evening at the house of the actress who has got the young Duke de Mallefert into so much trouble. But he was not at the Palais as a witness—for two police agents took him between them and walked him off."

"Grollet arrested!" murmured Raymond. "Grollet—the false witness!"

"Yes! and to tell the truth I looked so astonished that Buiron asked me what the matter was. Before I could reply, however, I heard my name shouted. My turn had come, and with a bow to my *confrère* I entered the room. I found the magistrate to be a man of the most perfect breeding, polite to a fault, but icy and pompous to a degree.

"Do you know what he wanted?"

"The particulars of the attempt to murder you on the outer boulevard, near the Café de Périclès."

"How do they know anything about it?"

"I can't tell you that; but they certainly know it all, and the magistrate said he was on the track of the criminals."

"Did he mention Combeldaine?"

Dr. Legris shook his head. "D'Avranchel is not an eagle," he said; "but he is too cunning to name the count. However, after I had answered all his questions, I wished to know if he suspected the truth. With an easy, indifferent air I said: 'It seems to me quite impossible that the law can reach the guilty parties in this case.' 'The law,' he answered, 'always reaches the guilty parties. It is slow to strike sometimes, but it strikes all the more terribly at last.' 'Yes,' I interrupted; 'except when the criminals are covered by the statute of limitation.'

"M. d'Avranchel rose as he spoke to me. 'You are right,' he said. 'Only it may so happen that a man who has committed one crime which has remained unpunished, commits another, and then it is that Justice interferes.'"

VI.

THE ideas advanced by the investigating magistrate were open to argument, but not the meaning of his allusions. So victory might be near at hand, and this was all the more reason why Raymond should conceal himself from Combeldaine. Dr. Legris had found a place of safety for him, but he refused to go there. He said he should prefer to take refuge in the apartment he had rented in the Rue de Grenelle.

"They will never look for me there," he simply said; "because it seems the height of madness for me to go there."

This was good reasoning to a certain extent, but the doctor was not satisfied nor duped. "Acknowledge," he said, impatiently, "that you wish to watch the Maillefert mansion, so as to be sure that the wedding won't take place without your knowledge."

"You are right," Raymond replied, in a determined tone—but he nevertheless took some precautions in going to his room, which he reached about seven in the evening.

"Don't leave the house," Dr. Legris had said to him. "I will come once every day to bring you some news; but I must be off now, for I am expected elsewhere."

Dr. Legris was to meet Madame Flora Misri, who arrived out of breath long after the appointed hour, at their rendezvous in the Rue de Suresnes. "I have had great difficulty getting here," she said to Legris. "I have so much to tell you——"

"Go on," exclaimed the doctor.

"Combelaïne has come back to me! He thought I was with Lucy, and so he sent a letter by one of his friends. And what do you think he proposes?"

"Tell me!"

"He writes that he is half crazy; that he has never cared for any one but me, that he is in despair, and will break off the marriage, if I say so. In short, he proposes that we should leave France and get married in America."

The doctor shuddered. "And what did you say?" he quickly asked.

"I hesitated," she replied, "because this man has occupied so much of my life, that it seems to me at times as if I belonged to him. If he had come himself—if I had heard his voice—if he had bidden me follow him, I know myself so well, that I feel certain I should have obeyed him. Fortunately, he did not come. And Lucy was by my side. Lucy pointed out to me that if I were to go away with Victor, he would not hesitate to poison me to get hold of my money."

"And so?"

"And so I have come to implore you to conceal me!"

In another hour Madame Misri was safe in the little house of the widow, at Batignolles; and Dr. Legris was at home again, reflecting on these strange and rapid events. Flora Misri, the millionaire, was Combelaïne's last card, and that he played it now, showed that he believed the game lost.

The next day Dr. Legris told all this to Raymond, hoping that he would take it as a small consolation. But Raymond chose to look at it in a very different light. "That will not prevent the marriage," he said. "Quite the contrary. Combelaïne will carry it out just the same. The whole mansion has been in confusion to-day. I have watched it attentively. Tradespeople have been going in with enormous packages. They are preparing for the wedding."

The doctor began to argue the point.

"I will wait until the last minute," interrupted Raymond, "for so I promised you; but I swear to you that Simone shall never bear the name of my father's murderer." And as he spoke he pointed to the table, where lay a pair of revolvers.

This was Saturday. The next day, about eight o'clock, Raymond saw Simone leave the house on foot, with Miss Dodge, undoubtedly to go to mass. About four o'clock Combelaïne entered the mansion. On Monday in the afternoon the doctor arrived, all out of breath. He brought an astonishing

piece of news, which had been in circulation at the Bourse, and which was generally believed.

The chairman of the Rural Bank, Baron Verdale, had disappeared, carrying an immense sum away with him. Some said he had gone to England, while, according to others, he had been arrested on the Belgian frontier.

"Yes, this is an important piece of information," said Raymond; "but all the same, it will not prevent Combelaine's marriage. To-morrow is Tuesday, and there is nothing to indicate any change in the arrangements."

The doctor did not speak; he was beginning to feel anxious. Where was Cornevin? Would he not appear? Still he hesitated to say to Raymond, "Act!"

The night was one long agony to Delorge, and the day had hardly broken when he was behind his blinds watching the Maillefert mansion. There was a certain bustle of preparations in the court-yard. At nine o'clock several carriages drove up, and out of them stepped the Princess d'Eljonsen, Dr. Buiron, the Duke and Duchess de Maumussy, with a few other members of their set; and, finally, all in black, except his cravat and gloves, which were snowy white, there appeared the Count de Combelaine. There was no room for further doubt.

"Come!" said Raymond, solemnly, "let my destiny be accomplished." So saying, he slipped the two revolvers into his pocket and hurried towards the mairie adjoining the Palais Bourbon.

There also a great deal of bustle was apparent, and a number of attendants were hurrying through the passages with carpets and chairs. Raymond stopped one of the servants and asked him: "What is going on?"

"A wedding—a count marries the daughter of a duchess." And then the fellow mentioned by which stairs and passages these people would reach the mayor's rooms, and in which apartment the civil ceremony of marriage would take place.

"Thank you, my friend," said Raymond, who calmly proceeded to select the spot most favourable for his design.

His sufferings were over, for he had ceased to reflect; he said to himself, simply and wearily, that all would soon be finished. He stretched out his arm mechanically to see that it did not tremble, and then stood still like stone.

He lost his immobility, however, when he heard the carriages dash up; for at the sound he darted to a window. "It is they!" he said to himself.

Then as he turned to regain the position he had selected, he found himself face to face with a stalwart man whose face was bright with intelligence and energy, and who wore the same livery as the grooms attached to the president's palace in 1851. This man caught him by the arm, and exclaimed, in an undertone: "Madman! what are you going to do?"

Raymond felt as if he were choking. He knew this man. He knew him to be the Englishman who had come to his rescue on the day of Victor Noir's funeral, and he recognized him also as the same person who had saved him on the evening of Rochefort's arrest. "It is you," he stammered.

"Yes," said the stranger, simply; "yes, it is I." And in a peremptory tone, he added, "Why do you carry those weapons in your pocket?"

Raymond made no attempt at denial. "I could not see any other way,"

he answered slowly, "of preventing my father's murderer from marrying the woman I love."

With an imperious gesture the stranger interrupted him. "Didn't you know that I was watching over you?"

"Forgive me, but——"

"Do you think I would allow another crime to be added to the long catalogue?"

Raymond shook his head sadly. "You have undertaken a most formidable task, sir," he said. "You don't know that this love of mine has been my very existence. I tried to meet you——"

Again did the man check him. "Events," he said, "were stronger than my will. Had I been discovered, all would have been lost, and I was determined—more especially for your own sake—to conquer."

At the bottom of the great staircase the sounds of many feet could be distinguished.

"Do you hear," murmured Raymond.

"Yes, I hear; but we have a minute still. One day, eighteen years ago, I was carried off, and suppressed as it were. I left behind me in Paris a wife and five children whom I adored. They were without friends and without money, and all of them might have perished, but, thanks to your mother, they were saved. I am here to-day, so that Madame Delorge, the noble woman who saved my children, may in her turn be made happy."

The noise on the staircase increased. Raymond began to speak.

"Silence," said the stranger. "No matter what you see or what you hear, no matter how far things seem to be going, remember that you are not to move nor speak—I am here!" And he drew Raymond into the recess of a window, where the two stood together.

It was time they drew back. The wedding-party was on the staircase. First came Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, whiter than her white raiment, whiter than the virginal wreath upon her brow. She leaned on the arm of the Duke de Maumussy, whose breast was covered with decorations. At the sight of Simone, Raymond felt all the blood in his body surge to his brain, and he caught at the wall for support. And yet pale as was the woman he loved, he fancied he detected in her eyes and on her lips a faint smile of hope.

She passed on, and after her came Combelaine, looking frightfully calm, and the Princess d'Eljonsen, and the Duchess de Maillefert; then Madame de Maumussy and Dr. Buiron, followed by two or three other persons, for it was impossible to give any solemnity to this marriage, when the heir of the name—the last of the Dukes de Maillefert—was in prison, accused of forgery and embezzlement.

"Come," said the stranger, drawing Raymond into the mayor's room, where they hid themselves in the rear of the sightseers.

The mayor arrived, wearing his tricolour sash of office. He was a tall old man, bald and thin, and as grave as the law he represented. He took up his position behind a desk covered with green baize, with his right hand resting on a large volume—the code Napoléon—yellow and worn from use.

"What are you waiting for?" whispered Raymond, anxiously.

"Hush," said the stranger.

The mayor, in a paternal voice, made a little speech, in which he spoke of the peaceful joys of a well-assorted union and the reciprocal duties of husband and wife. He glanced about for approval, but as the wedding

party remained stiff and cold, he got entangled in his discourse, and hastily passed on to the ordinary formulas. At last he put the usual questions "Monsieur le Comte de Combelaine, do you consent to take Mademoiselle Simone de Maillefert, here present, for your wedded wife?"

The count was on the point of replying affirmatively, when suddenly Raymond's companion stepped forward, and in a loud voice exclaimed: "This marriage is impossible!"

De Combelaine turned at once, and seeing this man dressed in the livery formerly worn by the grooms of the Elysée, he cried: "What, Laurent Cornevin!"

But the count was a formidable adversary. He gathered together enough energy to keep down all signs of concern, and regaining his superb impudence: "By what right," he asked, "does this man interrupt this solemnity?"

"By the right," answered Cornevin, "that all honest men have to prevent a scoundrel who is already married from committing bigamy!"

The mayor's embarrassment was very great. "The Count de Combelaine has been married," he said, "but we have the certificate of the death of his first wife, Marie Sidonie, in good form."

Cornevin advanced, towering above all the people about him, his bright face shining with honesty. "You may have a certificate of death, sir," he said, "but it is none the less true that the coffin of Marie Sidonie, at the Montmartre cemetery, is empty. There are witnesses who can testify to these facts. I call on Madame de Maillefert and on Raymond Delorge, here present."

Combelaine protested loudly. "My wife died in Italy——" he began.

"Enough!" interrupted Cornevin, in a tone of authority; "enough! And now, if you please, M. de Combelaine, I will tell you the story of your marriage. Finding yourself in one of those seasons of shameful poverty, which have been so frequent in your life, you married an unfortunate orphan simply to get possession of the hundred thousand francs which were hers. Did you dream, even at that time, of denying the marriage? Very possibly—for even your most intimate friends were ignorant of it, and no one ever knew the Countess de Combelaine. At the end of six months the hundred thousand francs were gone, and you were bound to her for life. But you are a man of expedients, and the law has prodigious latitude and strange indulgences. In less than a year you succeeded in corrupting your wife and throwing her into the arms of a lover. Then, one night you appeared, armed with that terrible clause of the code which gives an outraged husband the right of life and death. You talked very loud, declaring that the law was on your side. To purchase her life, Marie Sidonie consented to leave France and to die in the eyes of the world. A few months later you received a coffin from Italy which contained some sand, with a false certificate of death."

The ground was crumbling away under Combelaine's feet—and yet he persisted in struggling. "This man is an imposter," he cried.

But Cornevin laughed. "Do you want proofs?" he asked. "Very well, I have them, for I know all your life, since the day that Madame d'Eljanson launched you into the world. I know how you were ignominiously dismissed from the army for cheating at cards. I was present when you assassinated General Delorge. I can prove that you were the guilty party in the forgeries that have been attributed to Philippe de Maillefert. If Marie Sidonie's testimony is required, be easy, I know where to find her."

A wild beast seeking escape in a sudden extremity, might look like Combelaïne looked while Laurent Cornevin was speaking. But, suddenly, the count turned to the mayor, who was almost stupefied, and said : " Sir, I wish to speak to you in private."

" Follow me into my study, then," replied the municipal magistrate. And he and the count at once passed through a small door.

Almost immediately, however, the mayor reappeared alone, and with a most disturbed air exclaimed : " He has gone—my study has another door which leads out on to the stairs."

" The wretch has fled, has he ?" said Cornevin, quietly. " What does that matter ? The judge, Barban d'Avranchel, has issued a warrant against him."

He laughed aloud—Cornevin did—as he saw the marriage guests slink towards the door—the Duke de Maumussy and Dr. Buiron, then the Princess d'Eljonson, Madame de Maumussy, and the others ; so that no one was left with him, except the mayor, the Duchess de Maillefert, Mademoiselle Simone, and Raymond. For the first time in her life, perhaps, Madame de Maillefert was sincerely moved. Seizing Cornevin's hands, she exclaimed : " What do I not owe you, sir ? Thank God that I confided in you ! You have kept all your promises. My unhappy son alone——"

" Monsieur Philippe, madame, will be released to-day. Justice recognizes the fact that in this matter he has only been very imprudent. The deficit of the Rural Bank has been made good."

" And by you, sir. You have restored us our honour, life, and fortune. How shall we ever repay you ?"

As Cornevin listened he glanced at Raymond, who, with Simone, had retreated to the embrasure of a window. If Simone were weeping it was certainly with joy. " You know what you promised, madame ?" remarked Laurent.

" Before a month, sir, my daughter will be Madame Delorge," answered the duchess.

Cornevin triumphed, but his strong mind was not disturbed by his success. He now went towards Raymond. " All is not settled yet," he said. " As long as Combelaïne is not under bolts and bars, so long I tremble. I must leave you. You are in trouble respecting your connection with the ' Friends of Justice,' but here is a safe conduct from the judge. Go home at once ; your mother is dying of suspense. In a couple of hours I will be with you."

When Raymond was in the street, he asked himself if he was dreaming. Was this blessed tranquillity real, which had come to him after such intolerable anguish ? On reaching the Rue Blanche, he embraced his mother and sister with such evident agitation that at first they were alarmed, but they soon saw that it was not sorrow that excited him.

" It is all right, then," murmured Pauline.

Raymond looked at her, and seeing her colour deeply, he asked : " You know then ?"

" Yes, Jean wrote to me, so that—— But I have just told mamma all about it."

" It looks to me," said Raymond, " as if there would be two marriages instead of one."

But his joy did not make him forget Dr. Legris. He hastened to write, and beg him to come to him at once.

After dispatching Krauss with this note, he felt that he must be alone to regain his equilibrium, and accustom himself to his new happiness. He had

been about an hour in his room, when suddenly he heard a man talking very loudly in the passage. He seemed to be arguing with the old servant. Raymond rose to see what it meant, when the door of his study was thrown open.

De Combelaïne came in. He still wore his wedding garments, but in what a disordered condition! His cravat was torn, and his gloves hung in strips on his hands. He shut the door and locked it, and then standing in front of Raymond with his arms folded and his eyes blood-shot—"It is I," he said, in a husky voice. "Not content with ruining me, you have deprived me of my last resource. Flora Misri has disappeared; Verdale is in prison. While I was in the mayor's rooms, the police seized all I had in the world in the way of money and valuables, so that flight is impossible. This is too much. There are some people who are too dangerous not to be allowed to fly."

"What do you want?" asked Raymond, who saw his revolver on the writing-table within his reach.

Combelaïne went closer to him and hissed in his ear: "Over and over again you have wished me to fight with you. I am here to say that I am ready to meet you now."

The impudence of this man was incredible. How did he dare, now that he was unmasked, to propose a duel, the supreme expedient of men of honour?

"You forget," said Raymond, coldly, "that I have only to call out aloud to bring in the officers who are bidden to arrest you."

A spasm of rage contracted Combelaïne's features. "We are alone," he said, and his violence increased, "before anyone comes— There are weapons here! Are you afraid? What can I say to stir up your blood? Shall I recall the Garden of the Elysée to you? Shall I remind you that less than an hour ago the woman you love leaned on my arm? that she was to have been mine, and that I adore her?"

On hearing this, Raymond snatched a sword from a trophy of weapons on the wall, and threw it at Combelaïne's feet. Then tearing down the one which hung across his father's portrait, he drew it from its scabbard, shivering the red seals, and placed himself on guard, crying: "So be it! Let God Himself decide between us?"

De Combelaïne attacked him with blind fury. This mortal contest between these two men in this narrow space was something terrible. The clash of steel rang through the house; furniture was overthrown, glass was broken, and Combelaïne's hoarse cries—for he had acquired the habit of shouting with the foils when a fencing master—were most formidable. Raymond was slightly wounded in the neck; and his blood flowed profusely, when, all at once, violent blows were heard on the door, and it was burst open by herculean shoulders. In the passage outside stood Laurent Cornevin, Krauss, Dr. Legris, the baron, Madame Delorge, and the worthy old Ducoudray.

"Let no one come in!" cried Raymond, in a terrible voice. "This man belongs to me. Cornevin, see that no one interferes!"

These few words nearly cost him his life, for Combelaïne gave a tremendous thrust. But Raymond parried it, and as he sprang aside he found himself just under his father's portrait. Then when Combelaïne, determined on killing him, made another lunge forward, it was the face of General Delorge he saw, and it was the eyes of the man he had assassinated that his own gaze met.

"The general!" he cried, recoiling as before a spectre.

He did not utter another word. Raymond's sword pierced his breast and passed out between his shoulders. The sword of the dying wretch dropped from his hand, foam gathered on his lips, a last blasphemy was strangled in his throat, he fell with his face on the ground. He was dead!

VII.

THUS did Laurent Cornevin accomplish his task. What energy and patience he had needed to reconstruct piece by piece the whole life of Combelaïne and his accomplices, and overthrow so silently and certainly the complicated edifice raised by their intrigues!

However, he had been aided in his perilous task by his courageous wife. For on his last return to Paris he could no longer resist his ardent desire to see her, and it was in her house that he had been hidden during these last months of contest. But he was avenged. And it was from his lips that Madame Delorge and Raymond learned all that had taken place in the garden of the Elysée, on the fatal night preceding the *coup d'état*.

This was his story: "I was on duty one Sunday night, when at about one o'clock I was suddenly called. I ran forward and found myself in the presence of M. de Maumussy. 'Take a lantern,' he said, 'and follow me.' I obeyed him, and we turned into the broad avenue behind the hedge. Two men, General Delorge and the Count de Combelaïne, were disputing, the general being very calm, while De Combelaïne was furious. At last De Combelaïne drew his sword. 'You shall swear,' he cried, 'on your honour as a soldier, not to say one word of the secret you have wrung from me.' 'It was entirely without my own consent that I became your confidant,' answered the general, 'so I shall say just as much and just as little as I choose. I shall speak if honour commands it.'

"M. de Maumussy here interfered. 'But we cannot allow you to leave us in this way,' he said. 'What do you mean?' asked the general. 'I have my sword,' cried De Combelaïne: 'you have yours.' But the general answered—'I will not fight with you; let me pass, if you please.' Then De Combelaïne threw himself across his path, and cried out, passionately. 'You shan't go! You shall fight, I tell you!' The general drew himself up to his full height. 'And I,' he said, 'I repeat to you that I will not fight with a man who has been dismissed from the army for cheating at cards.' On hearing this, De Combelaïne drew back and made a tremendous lunge at the general, exclaiming: 'That will prevent you from betraying us.' The general immediately dropped, and Maumussy and Combelaïne fled from the spot.

"I knelt by the general's side, and heard the rattle in his throat. 'I have had my death blow,' he murmured; 'prop me up against a tree.' I did what he asked, and then he said: 'Feel my pocket and give me my note-book.' I gave it to him, and he tore out a leaf and wrote in pencil by the light of my lantern 'I am dying—murdered by Combelaïne with the connivance of Maumussy, because I found out that to-morrow——.' But at this point his strength failed him—he could not finish the phrase—still he added his signature, and then in an almost inaudible voice he said: 'Swear to give that paper to my wife!'

"I swore—but he was too far gone to hear me, I think; and he had indeed just breathed his last when De Combelaïne and De Maumussy reappeared. They took counsel together in low voices; and then they drew the general's sword from the scabbard and threw it on the ground. I helped them carry the body into a large hall, which had not been used for some time. I thought

they had forgotten me, but I was mistaken. The next day I went to Passy to obey the general's orders, but unfortunately Madame Delorge could not receive me. As I left her house two men, whom I did not know, approached me and asked what I wanted with the general's widow. I answered that it was none of their business. 'In that case,' they said, 'we arrest you.' The general's note-book lying on the ground had put the assassins on the track of the note in my possession, and they were determined to have it at any price. However, I have it still." And Cornevin, as he spoke, handed Madame Delorge the lines written by her dying husband.

Death came to De Combelaïne in altogether too gentle a form, but it had the immense advantage of putting an end to the scandalous suit from which the honour of the house of Maillefert could not have emerged without a smirch.

The next day, when the deficit in the Rural Bank was made good, the young duke was set free, and went off to Italy. He declared that he had received a lesson which he should never forget; but all the same, he took Madame Lucy Bergam with him on his trip.

Verdale, arrested at the Belgian frontier, was less fortunate; he stood his trial and was acquitted, to be sure, but he was ruined in reputation and pocket. Grollet, who was proved by Barban d'Avranchel to have been Combelaïne's accomplice in the attempt on Raymond's life—Grollet, the perjured witness of 1851—was condemned to ten years' imprisonment; while the day after Combelaïne's death the Duke de Maumussy took to his bed, and after a fortnight's illness died. Again was the word, poison, whispered. Was there any truth in the report? Only the duchess could have answered this question. But she was occupied with very different matters, having just signed an engagement with the manager of an American theatre.

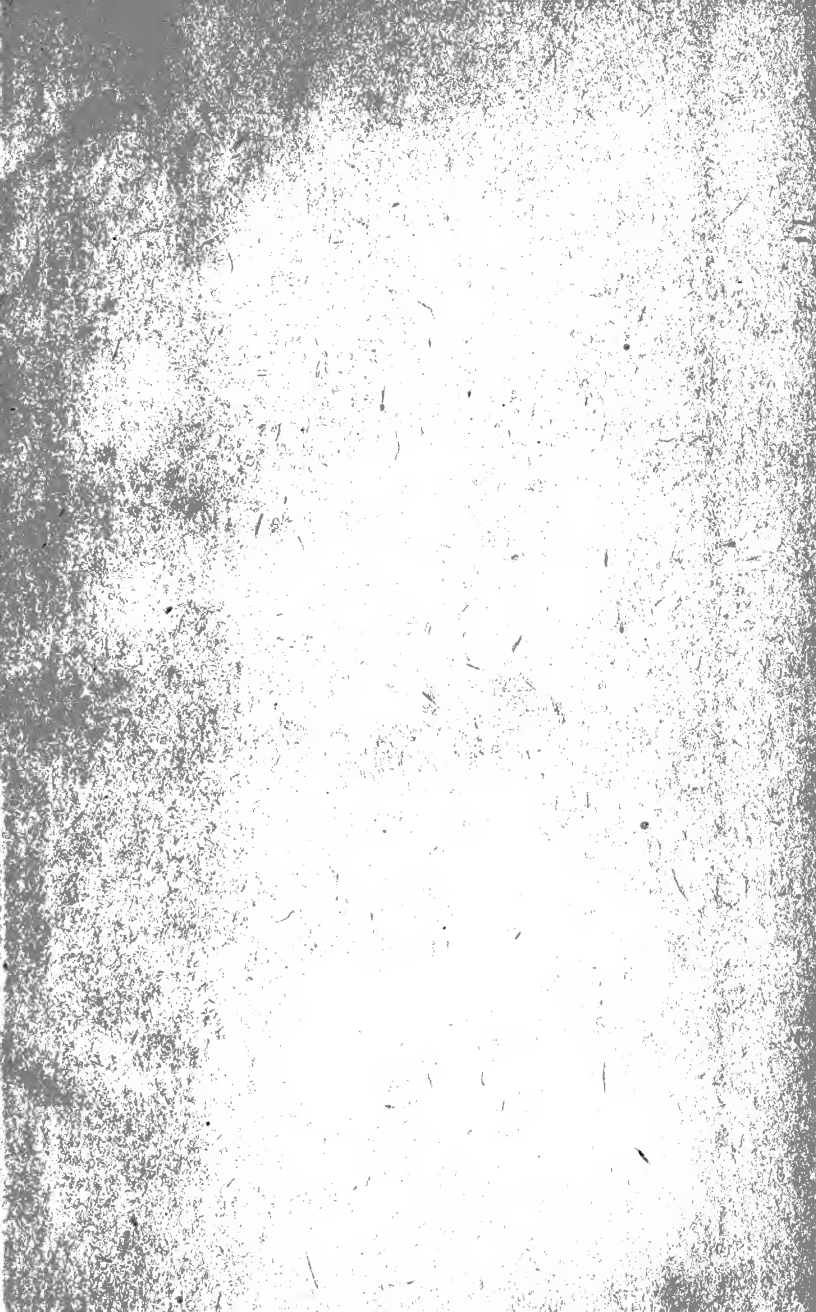
The Duchess de Maillefert kept her word, and the unhappy Simone de Maillefert became the happy Madame Raymond Delorge. The day they were married Pauline Delorge, moreover, became Madame Jean Cornevin.

Poor Flora Misri had a terrible blow at this time. She wished to settle a handsome fortune on her nephew, but Dr. Legris and Ducoudray were obliged to explain to her that her money was such as honest people could not touch, and that she now ought to have but one aim, that of making herself forgotten. "Good God!" she cried, "what am I to do with my millions?"

Dark days were approaching. The empire, with dizzy swiftness, rolled close to the edge of the abyss. After plots, counter-plots, and riots there came the plebiscitum; and then followed war, declared with a light heart, but culminating in defeat and revolution. It was all over. All the lying prosperity of eighteen years ended in unexampled disaster and invasion.

Raymond, Jean, and Léon joined the same regiment, and shut up at Belfort, they were spared the shame of a capitulation. M. Philippe, too, felt the blood of his ancestors grow hot in his veins. He was placed at the head of a battalion of Mobiles, and one day received orders to attack a Prussian barricade. His men hesitated. "I will bet you a hundred louis that I am killed!" he cried, and urging his horse on, he fell dead, riddled with bullets. But the barricade was taken.

If you go to Rosiers you will certainly stop at the inn of the Rising Sun, and M. Bizet de Chenehutte, after you have told him this story, will no doubt suggest that you should visit the Château de Maillefert, which has been magnificently restored; Bizet has charge of the property and keeps the keys; and it is the glory of his life that he is the friend of Raymond and his wife, as well as of the Cornevin family, the Baron de Boursonne and Dr. Legris.



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